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MANY CAMPS

BEING

SKETCHES OF INDIAN LIFE

(Reprinted from "Manchester Guardian.")

BY

A. W. HOWLETT.

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY
THE PIONEER PRESS
ALLAHABAD

1912

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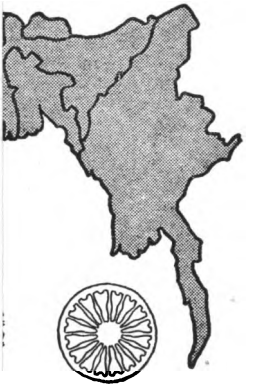

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MANY CAMPS:

SKETCHES OF INDIAN LIFE.

ARTICLES REPUBLISHED FROM THE
"*Manchester Guardian.*"

BY

ARTHUR WALTHAM HOWLETT.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I.—The Door of the East	1
II.—The Fire Carriage	8
III.—Night in a Dâk Bungalow ..	19
IV.—On the March	27
V.—Three Bridges	35
VI.—Something of the Frontier ..	43
VII.—Across the North-West Frontier ..	51
VIII.—Pendant Jewel of India	59
IX.—Miani Battle	67
X.—Sind	75
XI.—Through the Baluchistan Desert. I ..	82
XII. Do. do. II ..	91
XIII. Do. do. III ..	100
XIV.—The Tungi	108
XV.—The Desert in Winter	114
XVI.—The Persian Border	121
XVII.—An Indian River	127
XVIII —Coming of the Monsoon	137
XIX.—Kasauli: a Hill Station	146
XX.—Of Bungalows	153
XXI.—The Sahib's Burra Din	161
XXII.—Charon's Sheep	169
XXIII.—The Lucknow Residency To-day ..	177
XXIV.—An Indian Well	184
XXV.—The Coming of Night, a Dust Storm ..	192
XXVI.—In an Indian Garden	199

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INTRODUCTION.

It has seemed good to me to string together these few sketches of Indian life and scenes, which all appeared originally in the *Manchester Guardian* and are reproduced by the kind permission of the Editor of that world-famous journal, for certain definite ends. For one thing, it does not seem good to an author's heart that they should be lost, and if the reader should share that view, no further justification is needed. But apart from that, such sketches—heaven forbid, however, that I should reckon them as models for the purpose—seem at the present day to have a sphere of usefulness of their own; I mean as some indication to our ever-growing hordes of Indian visitors of what Indian life does mean to those who have elected to pursue it.

I was amazed when travelling home by the Far East to hear the ludicrous jumble of ideas which in the minds of many fellow-travellers who had "done" India constituted

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their picture of Indian life. Two vociferous American ladies who, apparently at great risk to their lives, had spent seven days in India in crossing from Bombay to Calcutta, filled the saloon with invective against the tyranny of the Indian Government towards the natives. A gentle reminder that, at least, we did not lynch them was snubbed and brushed aside. It seemed to me that what they did not know of India was well worth knowing.

But *pace* the omniscient and censorious American woman, there are more earnest travellers, and I have often wondered why these did not more often seek to ensue a truer realism of Indian life by neglecting their guide books and striking out bye-ways of their own. What conception of England could an Oriental gain by a jaunt through Westminster Abbey and Arundel Castle. The life of a people is not in their monuments; and the itinerant M. P. would draw less ridicule upon himself did he for a space deny himself the comforts and securities of the hotels of Agra and Lucknow and brave the risks and uncertainties

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of a few country dâk bungalows. These are a people of the fields not of cities, and until he has seen them in the fields he can know nothing of them. The cigarette-smoking loafer of the seaports and the patent-leather-shod babu of hotels are not fair samples of India.

A certain halo of romance attaches to the hardships of rough countries. It is commonly the only reward the Anglo-Indian has to look for, and it is pardonable if he feel some jealous irritation at those who without in fact having experienced a single one of his trials, difficulties and dangers, go home and cheapen them. Of nearly all Indian critics, save a few like Sir Valentine Chirol, it may be said *damnant quod non intelligunt.* Most err more through lack of sympathy than lack of knowledge. Knowledge of India may be assimilated like peptonised milk through a myriad blue-books. But the blue-books do not animate the dry bones of learning. They are as meticulous and fulsome anatomies compared with Shakespeare. No one would say

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a man knew men merely because he knew Anatomy.

It has ever been my fond hope when I have published these articles that they would enkindle a little of that imaginative insight which as regards Indian affairs seems so sadly lacking in people at home. Nearly all of them have been reprinted in the Indian papers, notably the *Statesman*, *Bombay Gazette*, *Times of India*, *Civil and Military Gazette*, etc., and I venture to take this as some guarantee of their popularity.

A. W. H.

Agra, 1912.

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THE DOOR OF THE EAST.

BEFORE one passes through the long, straight, man-made cut in the desert that joins the East and West, one must take a turn through the dirty city at which it begins. Port Said does not look dirty from the harbour. On the contrary, from the ship's deck as she swings round to her anchor a fascinating picture of blue water and terra-cotta buildings illumines one side of the waterway. True, the other (at which one need not look) is one long flat of stale mud, on the foreshore of which miserable curs pick and snarl amongst the drifted garbage. Here, too, are stacked the mighty piles of coal. Beyond is sandy barrenness painful to the eye. But on the other side the waterway between us and the town is alive with small craft, business-like tugs, heavy row-boats, lumbering

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lighters, while in long line reaching seaward lie the great liners at rest, going out or home.

A hot sun mounts overhead. Numerous small craft throng round our gangway, and up the steps clamber dark-faced Arabs clad in all manner of gaudy flowing robes, lugging baskets of curios. Bric-à-brac of olive-wood, cigarette boxes (as likely as not filled with paper), Turkish delight, pieces of tapestry—everything you cannot possibly want and yet would like to have. The price begins with rigid formality at four times the intended amount. You shake your head. "No; too much, too much."

"How much, then; how much you give?"

"Oh-er-four shillings."

"Four bobs! Ha!" A deprecating smile and pitying wave of the hand, as if in commiseration of the puerile business understanding of the foreigner. You are forgotten then! Are you? No! In a minute a dark face is thrust into yours.

"Six bobs, then; I give it you, give it away for six bobs."

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"No, no; too much."

"I toss you, then, for four or six. See, you call."

"Heads! No, it is tails. You lose; you pay me six bobs and it is yours." One often tosses, but it takes time to discover that the tossing invariably ends in favour of the seller.

But here is Port Said. The fine buildings of the Canal Company dominate the water front, painted a cool blue, with many arcades. The terra-cotta houses rise from the sandy roads behind them and to right and left. Above all, the desert sky blue and unpitying. What a medley of streets! What hordes of wandering pariahs, sniffing here and there; what oddity of costumes, blue and white, profuse and scanty; what padding of bare brown feet in the sandy roadway. A stately female veiled to the eyes, bearing her long black robe close folded about her, strides past like a Juno. A pock-marked Arab stalks by in his white bernous like a ghost. In a by-street a water-seller is filling his huge black skin, which distends itself into a hideous

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semblance of a dead and stiff porker. Another ambles by at a trot pushing his barrow before him. It is filled with black stoneware jars, in the mouths of which the cool water splashes invitingly.

We hired two donkeys, S. and I., not quite the princely asses of the East, but sufficiently elegant for two mad Englishmen. The boy ran behind, urging them on with loud Yaahs. Through evil-smelling streets, narrow and crowded, filled with whorls of dust from the roadway, and overhung by painted wooden verandahs all cracked and broken, we cantered gloriously till we came to the end of the town and the edge of the desert. A drove of goats, lean and silky-haired, ran by us, a woman driving them. We stopped to observe a mule-tram the like of which depicted by "Mr. Punch" would evoke derision for an overdone grotesqueness beyond the pale of humour.

We halt by a mosque, to which the donkey boy had directed us. It is a square pink edifice, capped by a fretted minaret and

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pierced by many deep windows. A blind man, with hideous blank eyes, red and swollen at the lids, is tapping his way round the railings of the courtyard trying to find the entrance. His quick ears hear us, and he blunders through the gateway bleating the eternal Eastern cry Baksheesh! By the doorway a sullen-faced Arab places huge basketwork shoes on our feet and leads the way inside. The cool dimness strikes pleasantly after the glare and heat of the roadway. It is a large, empty building with a carven roof propped on slender marble pillars, and pervaded with the slight radiance which filters through the unglazed windows. On the east side stands the "Mecca," a big pulpit-like piece of carving ornamented on either side with texts from the Koran. Facing it, each squatting cross-legged on his square of carpet, sit the devotees, a score of them, rapt and silent. Anon, one stoops in a sudden ecstasy and prostrates himself, kissing the floor with reverence. Through the silence we shuffle on under a low archway and into a court open

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to the sun, where the intense shadows fall with clear-cut definition on the marble flags. Two of the Faithful sit there in a huge shallow bowl of sacred water laving their bodies religiously. Another door, and we are in a chamber which is evidently archives, vestry, and sacristy in one. Much we are shown of little import to us uninitiated, till we retrace our steps through the courtyard of holy water and dark shadows, the dim mosque, and out again into the glare and dust.

The hucksters are still on our decks when we come back. Their prices fall each moment. We gather round a small gamin with thick Coptic features and lively eyes. He produces a tiny chicken from the folds of his bernous.

"Now you see me make two chickens. Hi, eat, Lewis Waller, eat," and he throws a grain of rice before it. The little creature pecks it up and, presto! there are two chickens.

"Burra, burra!" he trills, blowing his cheeks out; "burra, burra! now Lewis Waller, you lay me egg." He squeezes the tiny lump

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of feathers and out on the deck rolls an egg as large as the chicken itself.

"Now, Jock Ferguson, there, mister, you have two-bobs piece in you hand. Dat so? Close you hand tight. Now you sure you got dat two bobs.

"Yes."

"Ah! den you not say I steal it. Burra, burra! open you hand. Gone! Ah, well, I no steal it. Good-bye. Come 'long, Lewis Waller, you dam bad chicken to-day. Good-bye!"

And he struts down the gangway like a prince, lighting a cigarette as he goes.

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THE FIRE CARRIAGE.

It fills the Indian with awe and delight. It is one of those things which give him pleasure because he cannot understand them. He makes long journeys now for the journeying, not for the destination. Two days, three days, he will sleep in his old blanket by the side of the station entry, starting up as each train comes roaring in from the dusty plains to inquire if it is his or if there is room. Inwardly wondering at this plain embodiment of the omnipresent power of the Sirkar,* yet outwardly stolid as ever, he sees it grind its way into the terrible sunshine and hide itself in a whirlwind of dust miles away across the plain. By night it roars past his mud-hut with its spouting whorls of smoke and flame, and shrills out its whistle thin and far in his dreamy ears.

You wonder what they did before the railway! From Bombay to Lucknow it is

* Indian Government.

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nowadays a matter of twenty-six hours; then it was twice as many days a dangerous, toilsome journey by boat up the Ganges and the Gumti. And manners have changed as well as the miles. One reads with some amusement in these days a passage in an old military book relating to soldiers coming up from Calcutta by boat: "Officers are requested not to shoot at the natives on the banks, as it is a cruel practice." Would the natives nowadays kindly desist from blowing up viceroys, as that, too, is a cruel practice. Nine hundred miles right into the heart of the Peninsula from the muggy sweltering of the sea-line to the dry scorching blasts of the middle continent. And, further yet, on and on for three days to our school for war—Peshawar and Pindi and Kohat, and all the fierce, belligerent north-west. Or, further yet, to the snows "splintering with icy spears" the serene skies of the Himalayas. Howbeit, it is not a journey to make for pleasure unless you are a tourist doing the usual cold-weather round—Agra, Benares, and the rest of the show-places.

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At six in the evening the great Punjab mail leaves the Victoria Terminus at Bombay, and all night swings along on its gleaming track up and amid the brooding masses of the Ghats, across the vast solitudes beyond, by mud villages and broken-banked nullahs choked with tumbled rocks, through forests where its muffled roar scares the wolf prowling round the solitary leaf-hut, till the early morning breaks and streams with level rays across an arid plain. Then four sore-eyed passengers rise from four dust-laid berths, two near the floor level with the windows, and two near the ceiling where the lamp is still burning with the green shade which the last to fall asleep drew over it. The train roars on, the din incomprehensible to English ears accustomed to closed carriages. They shout to each other, making trumpets of their hands. The sunblinds hang like lowpent eyebrows over the windows. With a low, rumbling reverberation the wheels glide on to a bridge thrown across a mighty stream. The Nerbudda runs below, tons and tons of sandy brown water seen far

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up and down between forest-clad banks, and right beneath, through the skeleton iron-work, it is whirling and waltzing round the massive stone piers, tossing from hand to hand big logs like straws caught in a runnel of April rain. But see it in the monsoon, as I had the fortune to see it once, and you may realise what it felt like to be living when the Deluge began. Sublime at any time, it is then truly terrific. The medley of rocks and jungle on the banks seems scowling in dreadful reflection of the livid clouds overhead, and anon its broad surface is lashed into foam by the bursting showers. Compared with all that elemental force the majestic iron horse is a shadow. What majesty of conception was in the minds that riveted those tremendous girders and reared the granite masses for their bed! Not less was that which conquered the sierra-like peaks of the Ghats, where the line climbs zig-zag, and the train you will presently meet is puffing out its white clouds far, far down amid the billowy masses of the mountain forests hundreds of feet below.

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So the bridge is passed, and we are among massive boulders and broken ground scantily sown with small trees. The sun grows hotter rapidly, and the fierce light makes visible the dust with which the carriage atmosphere is permeated. Afar, there is no horizon, for there is no landmark sufficiently definite to declare it, and the aching eyes cannot gaze long enough towards the nebulous blending of sky and plain. The sky is like a sheet of oxidised silver, and there is no shade. The passenger wonders what he would do were he belated here, whether he would creep under a rock (to share it, perchance, with a scorpion), or essay the frail shelter of one of those trees whose existence seems a mystery. He watches the clumps of dried-up jungle for any glimpse of wild creatures. He may see a pigeon or two, that is all. Later, on the wide cultivated plains between Lucknow and Cawnpore, the train will often dash past a herd of frightened buck. So he watches for a while, till the sun is too much, and, flinging up the shutter with a snap, he throws himself back on his berth.

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Presently the train slows, grumbles, screeches, groans, and stops with a jerk. Doors open, not with that alacrity which you associate with the emptying of a morning train from the suburbs. It is not a matter of a ten minutes' perfunctory glance at a paper, then out again and off to the office; here one makes oneself at home; one has to live in the train, feed in it, and sleep in it, even try to shave and wash in it. The "bearers" of the sahibs present themselves with salaams, their turbaned heads on a level with the windows, and hand in the "chota hazri"* (biscuits and tea), then slip back to the servants' compartment. It is only a small station, a sort of island in the desert looking painfully dusty, as if the dust of all the plains had only it to settle on. There are two fountains of drinking water, one for Mahometans, one for Hindus. Natives squat about on the gravel platform thinking of nothing, their usual occupation. By the exit is hung a piece of old iron rail, five feet or so, and now a native coolie in a

* Early morning tea.

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blue slop begins to hammer it deafeningly with an implement like a poker. The guard blows his whistle. The noise is great, but it disturbs no one. It seems to occur to the crowd at last that the train may be starting, and one by one they climb into the carriages.

In the third-class carriages there is no recognised way of sitting, except that the seats seem to be forbidden as seats. At each corner a native reclines with his horny feet projecting out of the window, a menace to passing trains. Another sprawls over him; two or three squat on the floor. They smoke and grunt, chew and spit. If the train slows they rush to the windows (which have no glass), and all together crane out their heads. In their own compartments the women sit decorous and modest, the purdah ones close-veiled, but all with that marvellous quiet eastern dignity which even the lowliest seem to have inherited from their three or four thousand years of womanhood. There waddles the fat bannia,* just emerged from an Intermediate-class carriage, sleek,

* Merchant.

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oily, and well-fed. He glances in at the four sahibs in their long and commodious saloon with something akin to contempt, but not quite. He has half a dozen subalterns on his books who will remain there until their captaincies are due, and he knows precisely how long that will be. And yet he deigns to travel intermediate still along with the "omnium gatherum" of Eurasians and bazaar-wallas. With studied unconcern, yet with full knowledge of how ill the world would fare without him, a holy man with rank long hair, and naked except for his loin cloth, indescribably filthy, wanders in and out the jabbering crowds, attracting no attention. He taps along with his bamboo staff and is lost to view. Another passes and leers in at the carriage window. His forehead is marked with three horizontal grey stripes made with ashes to tell such of the world as care to know that he is a devotee of Siva. There is something vulturish in his cast of countenance, and with it a sneer; he preys on men's simplicity, and knows it. Nevertheless he is a very holy

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Yogi and collects many pies.* Up and down passes the waterman with his big distended skin, from which he sluices the bright fluid into the little brass lotas held by bony brown hands from the carriage windows, the sweet-meat seller, the fruit-seller, and the dispenser of bottled cholera in the form of pretty coloured mineral waters, exchanging many pies through the windows, and occasional rude remarks.

The shrill native voices re-echo in the station with the hissing of the engine; again the old railway line is hammered till the air is set singing, the engine whistles for the fifth time, and with another jerk the long train gets up the momentum for its next run. The four sahibs lie back amid their litter of impedimenta —valises, bedding, basins, uniform and helmet cases, swords, and articles of night apparel, and smoke and read. Everything is smothered in dust. The fierce light of publicity beats upon tooth-brushes and other articles, which would look out of place in a first-class

* Smallest of Indian coins.

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carriage at home. One takes fierce gulps from a Thermos flask which he has filled before leaving Bombay with an iced peg, trying not to see the averted eyes of his companions. Then a face appears at the window with startling suddenness, and a lean brown arm hands in a tumbler and a couple of soda-water bottles. It clutches the annas and withdraws while the owner of it climbs back along the footboard.

It is now about nine in the morning, and the train stops at a larger station. The engine departs, but presently comes back and attaches the breakfast car which has been waiting in a siding, its small kitchen steaming away in blessed preparedness. The sahibs climb in, while their bearers enter their carriage behind and sort out their bedding and flick some of the dust away; and so on till again there is a stop, and once more the breakfast car is detached and left on its siding, and the sahibs resume their seats where they spent the night. Now on again over the flying dust of these eternal plains. How good it is travelling north to come into the hills and to see those

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awful peaks and crags which wall in the Khyber, and glimpses of snow-caps far away. The air is full of white-hot particles bombarding you and each other with the energy of mutually attractive molecules. At another halt you stagger out through a few yards of glare and heat into a refreshment-room, where a long punkah swinging overhead enables an attempt at tiffin to be made. The train waits while you eat. And so the weary day drags to a close, and at dusk you steam into the crowded station at Cawnpore. Another long bridge carries you across the Ganges, ancient of rivers, and into starlight and the odour of wood fires, and you finally disembark from the dust-encrusted carriage which has brought you up from the sea and end it all with dinner in the refreshment-room of Lucknow.

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NIGHT IN A DAK BUNGALOW.

WHAT horror of great loneliness is this which drives a tired man in upon himself for his own maudlin society, which invests his bearer, that long-sinning and long-suffering servant, with a charm such as could only cling to Crusoe's parrot, and compels him, as the only assuagement of his weariness of life, to fall to watching the manœuvres of a battalion of small ants which are having night tactics on the whitewash of his wall ?

The khansamah has set a lamp on the table, which may go out, or melt, or crack, or explode, but will not give light. The chimney is already smoked, though the flame is low. Myriads of insects, moths and mosquitoes, buffet it and scorch themselves. The glow from it grows dimmer and dimmer, like dying fires of Etna, till the big room seems to be illumined solely by a circle of fire-shot smoke. The air is hot and dry. The pieces of newspaper which my bearer is unpacking from the

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valise crackle like biscuits whenever a foot treads on them. I envy my man his job. He has not much unpacking to do, to be sure, but he is at it with the assurance of a veteran. He unrolls two brown blankets from the valise and spreads them out on the charpoy; he lays out my uniform for the morrow; hangs my water-bottle on one peg, sword and pistol on another, then moves into the bathroom.

It is dark now outside. Through the open doorway there is a black square shot with stars like some star-spangled pall. A soft patter of footsteps comes in, and a silent, lean, tall figure goes by. Then comes a sudden metallic roar as a skinful of water is flung into the zinc bath, for the gliding figure was the bhisti "Bat ready, sahib," announces my bearer, and I move in. It is like all Indian bathrooms, a lofty place with whitewashed walls and cemented floor. There are no windows, and the guttering candle set on a stool flickers to and fro in soft shadows on the cracked plaster and the far-away dim rafters of the ceiling. A long green lizard runs up

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the wall by the doorway like a streak of light. Finding no cause for his panic he stops, screws round, and glares defiantly at the candle. One corner is barricaded from the rest of the floor by a small rampart of cement six inches high, and within the space thus formed is placed the bath. When you have finished the bath is tipped up, the water is spilt out on to the floor in this dammed-up corner, and escapes through a hole in the wall. It is through this hole that snakes come in to get at the frogs and lizards which find a bathroom a congenial habitat. Outside, the water goes into a runnel, which distributes it about the garden—that is in an ordinary dwelling; the compound of a dâk bungalow is usually like a small Sahara. The water had come from the deep well in the compound, fresh and cool. I had time, as I splashed it over my dusty and perspiring body, to reflect. I had been ordered up in haste to Pindi to join the Mohmand Field Force, and my equipment, in consequence, was of the slightest. After five days at Pindi I got orders to proceed to this

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small station within a few miles of the border. An aged train, on which I was the only European, crawled up with me to the small station four miles away, and a "tum tum" equally aged brought me and my bearer and valise to this present haven of rest. I was delighted to see the mountains overhang me, spur beyond spur, ridge alternating with ridge, and far away the clear cold glitter of snow-caps. Then came dusk and night rapidly falling, and then—the achievement of the Indian lampmaker.

As I said, I found a small army of ants employed in tactics on the whitewash, so I watched them marching and counter-marching, taking cover in the cracks, extending and closing, in an endeavour to find some method in their madness. I picked up the scraps of newspaper on the floor and read the scraps of news. Gentlemen figuring in the police news might have been reconciled to their present hard couches could they have seen the saving entertainment they were affording one of His Majesty's servants on the Indian frontier; and

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the advertiser of patent medicines seemed commendable, though not for his wares so much as his lies. By this time dinner was prepared, and the khansamah brought it over from the cook-house, whence I had long smelt the dry, smoky odour of burning charcoal. A man who has to "do time" eating does not criticise his fare much, so I forbear to remark on the cuisine beyond saying it was better than I expected. Soup, mahseer (a fish), mutton, toast, and soda-water fairly cooled. I had seen him cooling the soda-water, and the spectacle interested both mind and palate. A large open basket was filled with wet straw and suspended from a tree in the compound. It was then swung to and fro by a coolie, and the bottles, being placed in it, were rapidly cooled by the evaporation which the passage of the basket through the dry, hot air accelerated.

It was stiflingly hot within the bungalow, too hot for sleep. The four walls seemed to radiate heat as from the sides of a stove; the roof above rained it down from tiles baked all

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day in the sun. I had my charpoy carried out into the compound, and there, like a four-legged island in the great, baked square, it lay with its brown blankets almost invisible in the dark. A big neem tree rose near it, tall and spare. Lying there I counted the stars overhead. There were the familiar Bear, Arcturus, Orion's Belt, the Galaxy, seen in many climes before but never with so splendid a brilliancy. The stars of the Punjab are proverbial. Never had the Milky Way appeared so perfectly arched. There was here nothing nebulous about it. Well might an imaginative folk call it the road of their demi-gods. Between me and the stars big, silent bodies kept passing noiselessly, often quite near my head. They were the flying foxes, or fruit-bats, which live in the trees and in the eaves of bungalows all through the day and sally out at dark. Doubtless many things were abroad, but I heard no sound, not even the howl of a jackal. It was a hot-weather night, utterly calm and silent. My bearer lay coiled up in his blanket on the floor of the

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verandah, a score of yards away, and occasionally, like all natives, moaned and talked in his sleep.

With morning a low-born scraggy-necked cockerel mounted the low stucco wall of the compound just above where the khansamah made his rubbish heap, and shrilled out his orisons to the sunrise. In the grey, silvery light several tall figures came noiselessly through the compound casting careless glances at me as I lay—tall, big-boned Pathans with a swing of the shoulders and certain insolence of bearing which evoke a reluctant admiration even from the foreigner. A bullock cart rumbled along the road, and suddenly out broke that irrepressible chatterer the hot-weather bird, with his maddening crescendo note, "You're ill, you're ill, you're ill"—then, with a sudden drop, "you're dead." I got up and threw a stone into the tree just as my bearer brought me my tea. He smiled at my ineffectual wrath. "No good, sahib; he no care; he burra badmash (great rogue)." I sat on the edge of my charpoy drinking my tea till the

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sun rose and warned me that the ominous monition of the bird might be fulfilled, and then, as the silvery light grew to the glare of the Indian day, sought again the resource of the bathroom, reflecting that as I did so the lamps were still twinkling on (probably) wet pavements in Piccadilly and a score of clocks booming out midnight.

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ON THE MARCH.

THERE has been mighty bustle in this frontier town since I arrived three days ago. In the big stony squares where the miserable camel thorns protrude their vicious green-grey pin-cushions of vegetation stores lie littered, boxes and bags and camel kajawahs and mule saddles and rolled-up tents and big boxes of ammunition. In my own hospital compound is a similar, though smaller, farrago, again tents and boxes and panniers, all starred with the white patch and red cross. The big cantonment is five miles from end to end. From one office to another I know those five miles of bare, sun-tortured road as if I had been born on them. One generally goes a picnic with something left behind; but this is a very big picnic, and if anything is left behind it will not be long before you learn that that particular object is the one thing on which the whole army depends, and that the whole expedition might have been abandoned at the

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start with that forgotten. A sowár gallops up in clouds of dust with a message. Another ride to another office; and it is 105 degrees in the shade. Then back again to the sorting and storing of bottles. By the wall is a long line of sepoys drawn up for medical inspection. Sikhs all, of magnificent physique, enhanced by the big turbans rolled round their heads and the coal-black beards of the older men. In their turbans they wear the Sikh quoit, a deadly circlet of steel like a sword blade bent round, which, flung by a skilled hand, will sever a man's head from his trunk while he is yet yards away. They are examined and dismissed, and we go on sorting and packing, the babu and I. This is not where the romance of war comes in. "Sir, one bottle digitalis tabloids broken. What can do? Sir, orderly reports no wick in camp lantern. Sir, commissariat-walla has sent one budmash mule, very wicked animal. Sir, what can do?" But it is all over at last, and in heaps and squares our multifarious munitions lie waiting for the night.

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There is a singular inconsistence between the thought of war and the preparing for it, the one a hazy romance and a thrill, a mere sensation, the other hard prosaic labour. Nevertheless, as the time draws near for departure, the glamour of the first begins to shine across the consummation of the second. It is one o'clock in the morning, and an Indian night, soft, warm, and starlit, with a distillation of fragrances from the shrubs in the compound. A bugle rings out. Voices sound at the door, and there is the noise of my bearer knocking off his shoes on the verandah before entering to awake the sahib. He lights the candle, which flickers up, dimly displaying the disarray of the room. At home almost everyone is snug abed at this hour. But in India, where times and seasons matter little to the native, something of this independence affects the sahib also, and despite a certain heaviness of the eyes at first he is soon alert and slipping into uniform. Outside in the drive are a camel and a mule for his baggage, and his pony with its syce, all waiting in charge

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of a faithful orderly. The camel kneels like a mountain crag toppling with a certain deliberation; the mule, true to its kind, jibs round in circles as they try to attach valise and tent to its saddle. Another bugle call. There is hurry. I mount and ride into the dark to where on the great square a confusion of lights and voices confronts us. The mule and camel follow. It is good-bye to beds and bungalows.

Is this some big circus, then, about to move? Some childish memory recalls a like scene in far-away English fairs and villages. But here the camels are no spectacle; they themselves are aware of that. Here is a string of them, three flesh mountains, hummocked and ribbed and tufted, on a dozen long stilts. The nose of one is tied to the tail of the foremost, and in front of all a bony Pathan leads them by a string. A lantern flashes and a voice calls. It is the quartermaster, half-distraught. The camelman is trying to persuade his ungainly charges to kneel. He pulls on the string, uttering a low Shr! shr!

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shr! with a hissing noise, and presently down comes the leathery nose, down the long snaky neck, down the ponderous knees, down goes it all, and the loading begins. There must be such a thing as Camels' Rights, though, like others, they seem not likely to be vindicated. A big box is made fast on one side. Grr! grr! gug-gug-gug! and a long neck swings round to survey this strange attachment. Up curls the long nose. "Say, that's rather a large box, ain't it?" By this the other box is on the other side, and the bubbling and gurgling grow loud. Grr! grr! gug! The long lip is curling higher than ever. And they are putting another box on the first side. The boa-constrictor neck is swung round again, and the long yellow teeth are showing. "Easy, there. You take me for a bloomin' elephant. Understand, I will not carry that package. Now not one more. What, another! By all the—!" The rest too much out—Kiplings Kipling to repeat. One hour, two hours, and still we are loading. It is 3 A.M., and at last we start.

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The battalion is formed up. Now, company by company, a lantern at the head of each, it begins to move off the square. As each debouches on to the road the loud war yell of the Sikhs goes up from a hundred throats, waking the sleeping echoes of the emptied bungalows. Eight times, eight lusty yells, and the expedition has begun. Now come the mules and camels, a long string trailing behind and padding softly along the road in the dark, here a lantern, there a lantern, but all silent and wordless like a ghost throng. Five miles, and it is not yet dawn. Before us glimmers like a sheet of steel the broad moving expanse of the Kabul river. Now we are by it, and crossing it. The old song begins to hum hauntingly in the mind, "Ford! Ford! Ford of Kabul river! Ford of Kabul river in the dark!" Were ever such words of weird melody? And this scene is likely to impress them for all time. On the far bank we pass under a big stone tower, loopholed and gated with iron.

Pad, pad, of the great swinging camel

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feet; jingle of mule harness, clouds of dust, shuffling of tired men; on, on, towards the mountains, till at last the dawn breaks. A pearly lustre which gives phantom outlines to the scantily standing trees, thin acacias and thorns and cacti, with fields of rice and barley like darker square blots on the undulating plain. Here a mud village from which the dogs come out and bark, while from a mud wall a meagre chanticleer salutes the new day which brings him nearer to the cooking-pot. Hitherto it was hard to find or keep one's whereabouts in the line. Now I ride back to collect my hospital. Lord, what miles of mules and camels! Here is the mountain battery, with its tiny guns taken in halves and borne on their magnificent Argentine mules; here the machine guns; here the bundles of entrenching tools; here the water mules; here a thirsty sepoy draining his water bottle.

The sun is up, and his great shield is red as blood. The dreary landscape lies opened before us, dipping far away as over the edge of the world into the purple-black fissures of

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the mountains of the Malakand. For how many those fissures have been, indeed, the end of the world! Hour by hour, as the long column of men and beasts clad in its clinging cloud of dust tramps the stony road across those flat, barren lands, the ridges and crests rise clearer from gloomy ravines, and now behold on one of them a small white dot comes into view, the tragic fort of the Malakand. It is the single eye of all the dark tumult of mountains behind, gazing ever watchfully to the south across British India, from whence cometh its help. In two days we shall reach it, for it is yet many miles away. No doubt it has already seen us.

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THREE BRIDGES.

I HAVE in mind three bridges, with characters and romances of their own. They are Indian bridges all three, and a thousand miles separates each from each.

Here you are in a lonely spot which will terrify you and crush you down to a cowering mortal under the nearest bush with vague apprehension and unrest. You are alone, and on either side of you steep slopes climb upward to the sky, slopes littered with black boulders and tunnel-dark masses of undergrowth. To north and south mountains of jagged outlines hump up their shoulders against the exits of the gorge. Overhead is a sky through which whole continents of black cloud are pouring, fast as barbarians to the sack of a city. Now and then thunder rumbles. Now and then sheets of rain lash the slopes. Now the sun gleams momentarily, and from rock to rock, through fairy arcades of fern and over pavements of moss, the silver lace-

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work of running waters reveals itself and smiles. A few palms of dwarf growth clinging to the skylines tell you that you are not in England, and this bush beneath which you are cowering has leaves like elephants' ears, thick and leathery, no English growth.

A strange thing crosses the gorge. It has just obtruded itself on your view. It might be the web of some vast spider, so frail it appears, yet so unbending, so defiant of the breezes which blow up and down, bearing scents of rain-soaked herbs and warm wet grass. It is high—so high that you are a pigmy, a Lilliputian beneath it. Almost it must touch the clouds in their transit. It begins to quiver and vibrate; it rings and rattles from its feet which stand in the foaming torrent to its crown, below which the highest branches wave despairingly; it grinds joint into joint and braces itself like a live thing. And out up there from the fissured rocks a huge long mass crawls tentatively as though greatly daring. Steadily it moves forward, crawling out into space, with a temerity that will surely reward it with

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disaster. The monster web groans and creaks; iron bolts shake; girders strain; it sways, the rocks beneath it shudder. It is the Punjab mail crossing the Ghats. There are the tiny heads of the passengers peering down through hundreds of feet of nothingness. It is nearly over. The engine has begun to gather speed. She was crawling like a snail. Now with a shriek she dives into the rocks again. The last of the carriages goes after her. The bridge quivers still, sighs, and grows silent.

A thousand-mile leap and a grey Indian dawn, a dawn that reveals a desert, stares out with a cold unsparing eye on its ungrateful barrenness and ridicules each meagre tamarisk bush, mocks each sandy hollow as though deriding its pretence to hide some treasure, seeming to say, "It is all bare and profitless. Why do I shine here?" But it grows and pales the last stars as they fade on the breast of the river which has worn them like diamonds all night. A mighty river, with its banks and shoals and wide reaches of yellow water, a long-drawn sea from the mountains to the

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ocean. It brings down the hills to the plains, building up these leagues of fertile drift whereon live the countless souls of the Hindu race. It is the life-giver. And to-day is its festival, this day just dawned. And the bridge again must help. For here, too, is a bridge, another wile of man to defeat the barriers of nature. On the one bank desert sand and waste, leading at last to the rich but malarious tracts of the Terai; on the other a city, a city unique among cities, a city that presents for miles to the river ghats and temples, temples and ghats, spire and tower and battlement, old brokendown steps leading to mysterious angles and holes in the walls, hanging balconies of age-crumbled brick, tortuous alleys and bazaars, but all temples, temples and their purlieus. For this is an ancient city and a holy. On the flat mud foreshore before these bewilderingly arrayed shrines and spires a kaleidoscope of humanity is assembled. The air is hoarse with the roar of thousands of blended voices. The sombre mud is like a poppy garden in a wind. The white robes of

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men intermingle with the flowing red and yellow sarhis of the women. Along the water edge scores of small flags flutter on long bamboos. The current that goes sweeping under the bridge is laden with marigold flowers, loose, and in chaplets. Men and women are crowding together in the water, knee-deep, waist-deep. They lave the holy water over their brown bodies; they chant, sing, and pray, each one as if he were solitary. Lean fakirs, fouled with ashes and streaked with red and white, wander in and out the crowd. It is a Mela,* and from all the province they have come, men, women, and children, from villages days of marching away. And still they stream across the bridge. It is a bridge of pontoons, long, round iron tanks moored in the river by cables and bearing the track across them. There must be forty or fifty of them. They strain and tug at the cables as the yellow current rushes between them, but the crowd pours on unheeding. Country bullock-carts with their clumsy

* Festival.

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wooden wheels, small scissor-hocked ponies whose riders' toes scrape the ground, women with bare brown arms a-jingle with bracelets, bearing their infants straddled across their hips, bony countrymen with their iron-shod lathis, all purposeful, intent, silent, and tired. Many have fallen by the way; many been sick and broken. But the dawn of the great day has found them here, and the great Sirkar, ever kind to such poor folk, has built them a bridge to help them at the last. The great black pontoons groan hollowly, the cables squeak and sputter, the yellow waters gurgle, planks creak and bend, but the bridge holds and they cross over to salvation.

A thousand miles again, and how different a scene. The Sirkar does not rule here, but his hand is shown. It is a bridge again. It spans a rocky torrent beyond the frontier. Mountains all round, arid and forbidding, with eyes of hostility gazing down on our camp from a hundred shadowy gorges and rock-littered crests. Two or three solitary plane trees stand out in the low land as though to

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remind us that there are such things as trees in the world. Here is our camp. We have fortified it with sangars of loose stones. It overhangs the river on a small, rocky plateau. At small embrasures two Maxims look up and down the valley; from two small bastions two mountain guns are trained on the opposing hills. In a nullah out of the line of fire the transport animals, mules and camels, kick and grumble and flick the flies away. The other side the river dwell fierce and truculent tribesmen. Nightly from our camp we see their signal fires flicker from crest to crest and hollow to hollow. No friends of ours, yet we are building them a bridge. The river roars and foams in impotent wrath. For centuries it has ruled here, dividing foe from foe. But its rule is ended. Peace, a stranger here, has knocked at the door and is claiming one more of her victories. Though fired on we make no answer. This is the way of the British Raj. Be it bridge or tunnel, road or canal, we seek our aim and let the heathen rage. Afterwards we reprove them, explaining to them how

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childish they are, and their dark, Oriental suspicion is at length illumined by the dawn of trust. But here the Sappers move about like ants on the smooth boulders, and anon the roar of a blasting charge of gelignite penetrates the deepest nullahs of the valley and comes back in multiple reverberations like a sullen acquiescence. And day by day the bridge grows.

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SOMETHING OF THE FRONTIER.

THE expansion of Empire has brought us closer and closer in confrontation with those problems of retention or extension of boundaries which exercised earlier empires. As our borders extend they come in contact with races, which untutored in our aims, can only regard us as aggressors, or, unused to the sight of wealth, are enkindled with avarice and lust of plunder. So it is with these dwellers of the hills of Northern India, but now that they have become better acquainted with our methods and have witnessed for themselves the blessings of our rule amongst the people of the plains, they have little or no excuse for hostilities beyond rapacity. Their own hills are poor and barren, and, like the moss-troopers of old, they are compelled to plunder for mere livelihood. When they see the fertile tracts spread out in their ken far below, and realise their vulnerability, down they come among the sleek bannias like

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wolves on the fold. Then follow deeds of cruelty, which do not, however, connote any particular hatred towards the objects on which they are wreaked. It is only the exuberance of a natural ferocity. It was not easy to solve the problems of frontier pacification without the absorption of these peoples, a process that would have been both costly and unprofitable. The difficulty was compounded by a scheme which, to one who beholds it at work, has all the elements of one of those inventions which apparently so simple in design have yet had to wait for the right man to discover them. By it both the poverty of these peoples could be ameliorated, and so their raiding deprived of any legitimate excuse, and at the same time their bellicose instincts satisfied. Arms were given to the more tractable of the tribes in closest proximity to the border, with which they were to prevent incursions of the more remote, and a certain payment was made to them and their chiefs. They thus form a kind of military police held in obedience by ties of self-interest and by an increasing desire

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to retain the good-will of the sovereign power, the might of which they increasingly come to realise. Nowhere as in the East is might so indisputably right. Nowhere is such adulation of the conqueror, even of the tyrant. It is a singular thing that the words for "gentle" and for "poor" are in Urdu the same, which sufficiently indicates the attitude of the Oriental towards what we Occidentals call chivalry.

There is one element, unfortunately, which has to be reckoned with in addition, and that is the religious one. Like many primitive peoples on the verge of civilisation, they are priest-ridden and slavishly superstitious. It only needs a clever Mullah and the appropriate "psychological moment" to fan their ever-smouldering fanaticism to a flame. Such a one has been preaching here in a valley six miles away, trying to incite the tribes to attack our camp. The Political Officer sent us warning. We sent out a spy, one of the native levies, to find out. He has returned with the news that, so far from rising at the Mullah's exhortation, the tribes are laughing at him.

I imagine, myself, the tribes, all true

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believers as they are, have recently had enough of sanctity, and consider themselves fairly safe set on the high road to salvation without bothering to slit the throats of unbelievers. For the month of Ramazan is just over, when the good Mahometan—and (with that strange disparity between creeds and consciences) the bad one as well—between sunrise and sunset allows himself neither food nor drink. The deprivation is hardly conducive to good soldiering in a difficult and dangerous country. Men fall out exhausted and fainting before the march is well begun. This month of abstinence concludes with the appearance of the new moon, and the eagerness with which he is awaited tells surely enough the strain the faithful Mussalman has had to endure. Next day is the Id, when uproarious feasting concludes the penance. The reader will remember Omar Khayyam's quatrain:—

Be of good cheer, the sullen month will die,
And a new moon requite us by and by;
Look how the old one, wearied, bent and wan,
With failing steps, is fading from the sky.

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One afternoon we found a big crowd gathered on a ridge outside our camp. They were not chattering as a crowd of natives is wont. They were all gazing away intently towards the top of the opposite hill. We asked what they saw, and they told us the new moon. We gazed hard, but could not see it, though one of us, at least, was keensighted for a sahib. It was fully half an hour later before, the darkness falling, we were just able to discern it, as it set by the shoulder of a yawning gully. There was no doubt that the Pathans had seen it when they said they did.

These frontier levies are of course under the rule of their own Khans, but are directed in all matters not internal by our Political Officers. Our engineers build their levy-posts, strongly built stone towers machicolated and loopholed which overlook the narrow valleys and their donkey tracks and dominate important tactical points, like fords and bridges. Naturally, the feelings of other tribespeople are not exactly cordial towards these seceders from old border tradition. Two years ago

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they had a great "little war" in this valley. We pick up old cartridge cases now, and find still the stone sangars built here and there up the hillsides. Many were killed. The valley rang all day with sporadic rifle shots and the deeper booming of jezails. A strange figure haunts our camp in the person of "Shuffy." I think I might say "Shuffy" by name and shifty by nature. A short, long-faced man with a black beard, in the usual hill dress, a short jacket and wide trousers fastened tight at the ankle, with the long-toed slippers curling up over the foot like a scorpion's tail—such is our Jemadar of native levies. "Shuffy" is not his real name, but a sort of diminutive of it devised by us for saving time. He is a generalissimo of some three hundred levies, all armed with Government Martinis, and seems to be in some doubt whether to sulk at our usurpation of his small dependency or be glad of the chance of earning a little glory and a few more or less honest rupees. I have been several times a short distance down the river, taking an escort of sepoys or some of

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"Shuffy's" levies, after the duck which have begun to arrive here on their winter migration to the plains. In the evenings, as we sit outside the mess tent, we see their V-shaped flights passing overhead, generally out of shot. Some, however, tired or attracted by the sight of the river and small paddy fields, drop and linger awhile in the valley. Many of these, it is to be regretted, will never now view the promised land. It is sad, but roast duck is a tempting variation in a diet of goat and rice.

But the great valley has its softer charms. I found one one day when I had to take out a water party. After a great storm the river came down so muddy that it became necessary to seek water elsewhere. With a dozen sepoys and all the available mules, I found a small burn coming down from a shallow groove in the hills; and then, having sent a sentry to the top of the burn and one above us on each side, set the bhistis to work to fill their big leather mussacks. The morning sun came out strong, and the tiny glen was filled

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with the scent of wild thyme which grew luxuriantly all along the close-set lips of the little stream. Crimson dragon-flies flashed and poised, big stone bumble-bees hummed and droned, while ever beneath, the little torrent dripped with a murmurous plowter from rock to rock. I observed the bhistis, having filled their mussacks, were busy as schoolboys catching small crabs from under the stones.

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ACROSS THE NORTH-WEST FRONTIER.

THE valley runs north and south, flanked either side by steep hills which descend by rocky slopes and terraces to the river. In the native language its name means five nullahs, but which the five nullahs are it is a puzzle to decide, for one can count at least a score fretting the imprisoning walls about us and every ridge is broken by deep scourings into ridgelets and hummocks a hundred-fold. Along the riverside, beds of iron-grey rock oppose their angles to the rush of the brown torrent, some still sharp and jagged, others worn and polished by the attrition of countless summer floods. For the floods come down here in summer when the snows melt up above, and when, after some spell of hot days during which the valley becomes a furnace, a tempest peeps blackly over the northern height and precipitates itself in a fury of wind and rain. Here we have intruded into the silences of

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centuries. The eagle-eyed tribesmen dwell here alone with their feuds and their famines. Their best friends are still the rocks and the scant tussocks of spear grass. They can hide with the jackals, hate with the scorpions, see with the kites. Only one thing they asked of civilisation, of its many artifices only one appealed to them—the long gun and its accoutrements. As we came up hither by broken tracks along the edges of torrents, where the gorges widened, we saw small meagre fields, dry, brown, and dusty, and there by his rude plough sat the savage, ragged, dirty, and ulcered, with the long jezail between his knees. On the long steel barrel the sun flashed and re-flashed, from the brass bands outshone a sparkle as of gold, the wood was polished like glass. Not a speck marred that idol of solicitude. The contrast with his dirty rags was odd. It is strange what his gun is to the tribesman. The one thing of any value at all he has in the world, all that makes him a man, all that stands between him and his enemy. Its ready potency and cruelty strike

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a harmonious chord in his own nature. It sleeps with him on the hillside and shares the warmth of his thorn fire on the autumn nights. I asked one at what range he could kill a man with such a piece, and he told me confidently six hundred yards. This, though the bullet is spherical and the barrel unrifled; but the powder he puts in is enough to burst a punt-gun, and he measures it from the powder-horn of hate. The longer the feud the more the powder. Here the man derives consideration from his gun. He who, by hook or crook, has won possession of a Martini-Henry, or, better still, a Lee-Metford, is a man among men. If he be a young blood he is the one to give trouble. What young Rustum * can possess that darling bit of machinery and see down in the valley the camp of the invaders and remain still. It only needs the taunt of a mountain belle, "You, you are no man. Go and kill a sahib; then perhaps I will look at you," and he sets forth. Snake-like he writhes his way to some steep crag. There in the

* The Indian Hercules.

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sunset his keen eyes descry the mess table of the sahibs in the middle of the camp. At night, when all else is dark, that will be alight with candles. Between rocks he trains his rifle on it at a thousand yards and fixes it; then, when night has come and the candles make a little splash of light down in the valley, he presses the trigger. Instantly every candle goes out, and his delighted fancy pictures the sahibs tumbling over each other as they rush to cover, while he scuttles away down the other side of the hill.

But to return to this particular valley where we are now encamped. It is one of a hundred such along the frontier. It is hard to find in it any distinctive features. It might be in the English Lake Country or the heart of Wales, were it not for the midday sun and the fortress towers perched on every isolated hilltop and spar. Curious buildings are these, like lighthouses built square, with overhanging tops, and pierced by long slit-like loopholes for rifle fire. A white figure squats on the top, peering up and down all day. Sometimes the

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sun glints on his long jezail. The door is half-way up, narrow and low, and reached by a ladder, which the ingoer pulls up after him. For the rest, a few dark-green olive trees of low growth, which climb the nullahs like weary scouts, the ubiquitous camelthorn, grey and spikey; the long waving spear grasses; here a nullah deeper than the rest, and greener; the tumultuary boulders by which the torrent leaps and curvets, glides glassily here and breaks into tawny crests there—such is the view the sailing kite has winged over since the days, two thousand years ago, when the Buddhists built their hill towers in the lower valleys and gave their philosophies to the comforted and their bones to the careless crags. For a half-day's march on the way hither we traversed what was known as the Old Buddhist Road, a rough track littered with stones which made hard going for the camels, and every now and then, breaking down into soft drifts of grey sand, sank our horses above their fetlocks. The dun dust from the hundreds of feet and hoofs enveloped us in clouds. At last we

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came on a terrain of flat land between the receding hills, of thirsty and sterile aspect, but broken up into small fields by low ridges of mud and showing ashamedly some dwellings of men, like an old man called to task for his niggardliness. For they lay square and squat and flat-roofed, so much the colour of the dry earth they might have been mere mounds. By them squatted the hawk-nosed Pathans to watch our cavalcade go past, their little saucer caps on their heads and their long guns between their knees. And on us all gazed down from the bolder bastions of the hills those silent relics of the ancient hierarchy, tumbled and broken but still revered. But that was two days' march from this valley. Here are few signs of men, ancient or of to-day. Only a small village at the foot of a nullah opposite our camp, of low flat houses whose outer walls all join so as to make a fort, and hard by it a cemetery with its mounds of dry earth and slabs of unhewn stone to defy the jackals which nightly come there and howl.

Morning and evening we see from our

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camp the womenfolk going out to draw water and driving home the lean black buffaloes. One morning the Khan of a neighbouring valley came in to pay his respects. He came with a long retinue of white-skirted ruffians, all bristling with swords and pistols, and sat down gingerly on the extreme edge of a chair while his myrmidons stood behind him in what they considered an attitude of "attention," stiff as tailors' dummies. With much ceremony he handed over two sweet lemons as a present. It struck me as a most appropriate gift, for in his heart he loves us about as much as a scorpion does a tarantula. It was a scene from any old Marco Polo book. Such that famous wanderer must have seen 500 years ago. As for the Khan, he is not likely to see this, and I trust he will not, for I should not like to offend him. It was only last week he was riding in state down this valley, when one of his dutiful subjects came out to salaam. The answer was a shot from the Khan's pistol which stretched the poor devil out in his own doorway. When royalty gets

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a " touch of liver " up here, it fares ill with the private citizens. I have never been in Corsica, but I have seen it from the sea, and I have read Prosper Merrimee's " Colomba," which is almost as good as a visit, and I have an idea that even a Corsican would be a little scandalised if he came here, and would regret the comparative civilisation of the *maquis*.

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PENDANT JEWEL OF INDIA.

THE Hindoos called it the pendant jewel of India, the Dutch who gave less rein to poetic imagery, compared it with a ham. But, however, these two peoples may have viewed the island, there it lay before us in all its embosoming of tropic waters, a tropic beach with a tropic sky overhead, severe even through its clouds, with the tropic feeling in the air known only to voyagers by the equator, muggy and moist and warm, prodigal of life yet spendthrift of it too, and, behind all, dim range behind dim range, the forest-clad mountains of the hinterland. The beach was silver-white on which the trampling surf leapt with tigerish springs, as though in frantic endeavour to tear the cocoanuts down from the nodding tops of the palms. It shone white in sudden clouds against the palm stems, set so thick that they made a black wall through which no light shone. All along the curves

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of the shore and by the elbows which thrust out seaward the palms made their barricade. Behind were hills growing dimmer with distance; but on the nearer ones verdure and jungle hid the bare earth and rocks. And, sweeping the glasses along, we brought into the field a few huts by the edge of the surf and in the shadow of the palms, where fishermen dwelt their quiet and nature-fed lives.

This was Ceylon, and we rolled and wallowed along in the big green seas with the fancy of spicy breezes reeking along our decks. In a little we came opposite Galle, and slowed down as we wished to signal there. As we drifted inshore, our engines grown strangely silent and the catamarans of fishermen sinking into the green ocean valleys all about us, we had time to observe this ancient European settlement of the East. White façades of big buildings stare out seaward from rocks and palms, two or three ships lie anchored close in, but, with the querulous persistence of age refusing to yield to modernity, an old fort projects its bastions

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seaward. The walls are time-bitten and mottled with yellow and red and sepia in varying shades, and a yellow creeper clambers towards the parapets; hard by is a chapel with a little belfry at each roof peak. Its walls, too, are stained. It is a commentary on old schemes of colonising. These were the first things they built, a fort and a church, the one to praise God, the other to rout His enemies, who by a felicitous conception were invariably the adventurers' own.

At last, to our great reward, we discerned far back a mighty mass of the shape of a man's thumb, in a sacro-sanctity of seclusion as it were, since all the other ranges seemed to grow less as they neared it and then, before touching it, to stop altogether. A great dim mass like a thick mist with an immovable envelope, seen afar across the jaws of ravines and broken peaks and jungles, such appeared the famous Adam's Peak. There, cloud-neighbouring, was the sacred footprint of the Master* revered by millions. There the

* Buddha.

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wild elephants go to die when they feel their end approaching. There a hundred legends of Eastern mythology are cradled. There fought Ram when all the monkeys came to help him. There the clouds rest and break and flood the tangled ravines in the monsoon times. It is always cloudy here, and often raining. I gazed on the far-off vision with some emotion, as on an old dream realised. Long ago I had read of it as I ranged through unexplored geographies, and of many lands that captivated the fancy Ceylon and Brazil were first. Brazil I had seen; now my fate brought me here at last. So, in a way, by much longing, we seem unconsciously to create our own destinies. There was a regiment at Calcutta which it seemed good to the Government to move, and that no mere dancing distance, but to the other side of India—to wit, to Scinde. They were to go by sea. I got orders to join them. I took over medical charge of the ship, and we dropped away down the Hooghly with some eleven hundred souls on board. Before we came into the latitude

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of Ceylon small-pox broke out among the Lascars. After a conference, I desired our commander to put in to Colombo, and, he consenting, we went close in and signalled our plight and intentions at Galle. In this strange fashion I came to see Ceylon.

We managed to make arrangements, despite our quarantine, to go ashore at Colombo. The surf was plunging and leaping over the great break-water before the harbour, and our small shore boat danced like a cork even inside, now cocking her stern, now her bows, as she crept quayward through the shipping. A British India boat came sliding by us, pouring out her black smoke in the gusts of the sea breeze, and behind a French Messageries boat, whose black sides fretted with portholes, like some Argus-eyed sea monster's, towered above us to her old-fashioned square yards. Ashore lay black mountains of coal. It seemed a model city of the East, Eastern in its palms, gardens, balconies, verandahs, mosques, bazaars, yet un-Eastern in its freedom from filth and

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stinks. The traveller in the East comes to take these two latter, with beggars, as the inner spirit and completeness of Oriental cities, an inevitable detraction which has to be borne, and to find them absent while the other attributes are there in their strange and unspoilt designs gives him a happy shock. There are broad, clean streets and low-browed verandahs, small boulevard trees, big stone buildings with flights of stairs, marble, and plate-glass windows, and trams undecorated with advertisements, large fresh-water tanks, and then, further out, the bungalows with their compounds, stone fences half-hid by the broad banana leaves, mosques with their pillars and triple domes, and bazaars of coloured waters, cocoanuts, and tin boxes.

I rode in a rickshaw to the Cinnamon Gardens, a couple of miles out. The coolie picked up the light bamboo shafts and trotted off with the ease and lightness of a thoroughbred. At times as he ran—a very Æolus he must have been—he called back over his shoulder to me. "Master—want to know

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things—very good—see there—that Banyan tree—very fine—that Mahometan mosque—there bread-fruit tree—here bazaar native people live—master come from London—no—this mango tree." His cheery good humour and freedom of mind set a strange charm on me, who had grown to be obsessed by the sulky indifference of the Hindoo. We came at last to the Cinnamon Gardens, where the evening air was heavy with the scent. Cicadas shrilled all about us. The stars glittered through the boughs overhead. My man swung himself into a tree and broke off a large spray for me. He crumpled a leaf in his hand and gave it to me to smell; and forth came the aroma subtly distilled between the sea-breeze and the tropic sun and the warm earth, a memory for all time. He had taken the lamp from the rickshaw, and by its light he took me from shrub to shrub and flower to flower. He kicked casually at a small heap of earth with a little hollow in the centre. "There cobra at home," he remarked. I asked him if he feared cobras. "No, me

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Buddhist," he replied, as though that excused him the common failings of humanity.

Unutterable regret filled me to turn my back on the fair island; but being bound on the wheel (of all the most ruthless) of military discipline and future prospects, I could not indulge my fancy to flee to those hills which enticed with every seduction of wood and water—such a lure as only those who have known the dreary hot plains of Hindustan for a dwelling-place could feel the power of. In a short time I bobbed away again over the dark waters of the harbour towards the dim outlines of our ship, with a myriad bright lights punctuating the dim-seen quays, and the ghostly shadows of the far-flung spray beckoning across the seawall.

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MIANI BATTLE.

I LATELY read of the passing of that great historian of battles Sir William Butler, whose pages stirred me long ago with the romantic and wildly mournful pictures of "The Great Lone Land," one who was well qualified to write of battles, having been in not a few, but who through indiscretion not in accord with official ideas failed to enjoy the highest promotion of his merit. He wrote with peculiar sympathy of a kind of *alter ego*, on whom he might almost have modelled himself, so many parallelisms of character eventuating in parallelisms of behaviour did he betray. This man he wrote of, and wrote of very plainly as a hero, was Sir Charles Napier, conqueror of Scinde; and since the field of his decisive battle lies now but a mile or two from me, I have thought it worth while to re-discover it and bring it again before the people at home, for whose Empire it was fought. It must be reckoned one of the decisive battles of our

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Indian Empire. It was fought, like Plassey, by a handful of men against overwhelming odds, and resulted in the destruction of the enemy as a fighting force. It led to the subjugation of this then unhappy province which the victor proceeded to administer with the tenderness of a mother for a child—which did not, however, prevent his arraignment later at the bar of those whose business it seems ever to be, curiously often in the name of humanity, to belittle the bold and pragmatic deeds which have won a peace their own vacillating pusillanimities could never secure. Carlyle wrote of him: "The path of such a man through the foul jungle of this world, the struggle of heaven's inspiration against the terrestrial fooleries, cupidities, and cowardices, cannot be other than tragical; . . . anarchic stupidity is wide as the night; victorious wisdom is but as a lamp in it shining here and there."

Out beyond the mud roofs and walls of this city* with their strange array of wind-

* Hyderabad.

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shafts set all at one angle to catch the prevailing breeze from the far-off sea in the terrible hot weather; over a wide and dismal plain of sand clothed, yet not so as to conceal its nakedness, with the wind-tortured tamarisks and here and there the prickly babul trees; at a spot where nullahs and cross-nullahs break up the ground and lead the infrequent rain-waters down to the Indus, there lies the battlefield of Miani. The dry bed of the old Fuleli river makes here a semicircular sweep on its way to the Indus hard by, and it was in this position the wild and savage Baluchi tribesmen who had rallied to the banner of the Amirs from all the barren wastes of Scinde and the stony frontier hills beyond were found waiting on that morning of February 17th, 1840. Napier had come to seek them with his little force of twenty-two hundred against their thirty thousand. It was but just after dawn, and how easily a soldier may picture that scene. The long lines of men with their long shadows before them, the camels and the baggage and the heterogeneous crowd of followers, all

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struggling on through the tamarisk in the cold, grey morning light while the dim wastes around them woke slowly from the dews of the night. They halt and make breakfast, filling the vista of the plain with unwonted columns of blue smoke; then start again, and move on until now the scouts ranging the country a little in advance have found the enemy. They halt and prepare their line of battle, parking the baggage behind. By the river here the country has changed a little. It is diversified by patches of acacia woods and by a small Scindi village. The enemy have not been slow to find the advantage of the position. The woods and scrub conceal their numbers and hide the disposition and strength of their flanks.

The main body is drawn up in dense masses in the dry Fuleli river bed, with a frontage of some twelve hundred yards. On their right flank they occupy the village and one of the woods; on their left another wood, which is marked off from the plain by a wall. In the wall they have made a gap, intending,

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when the British line has passed it, to pour numbers through and fall on the rear. Luckily Napier has seen the ruse, and, as he passes, fills up the gap with the Grenadiers of his Twenty-second Regiment. It was here, when the battle had been established, the British forces suffered heavily, the captain of the company, Tew, dying at his post; but none of the enemy got through. The British attack was made in echelon formation. Company by company, the small force, after a brief firing of musketry at the short range of those days, swept on in a charge to the edge of the nullah. The nullah was wide and deep with steeply sloping sides. What a spectacle it must have been, only those familiar with the appearance of the ordinary Baluchi can conceive. A tall, raw-boned man is he, with long black oily locks falling down on each shoulder, a puckered and ferociously screwed-up face, and swathes of white garments about his limbs clinging loose like the mists about his ancestral hills, only tightened by a sash at the waist. On his head is a pugaree of many folds. On

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his feet he wears the shoes with the thin turned-up toes like scorpions' tails. Such a one you may see any day in the bazaar here or striding about the station platforms on the way up to Quetta. And 30,000 of them, with tulwars and shields, shrieking their maledictions and half mad with hashish and imprecations of their mullahs, filling that long curving hollow in the desert sand! Small wonder, the shock tactics were not at first successful.

Twice or thrice the British line wavered, each man in it carrying on single combat with man behind man of fiercely-thrusting Baluchis. For three whole hours it lasted, the shot firing, the clash of bayonets on shields, the repeated thunder of guns firing case shot on the flanks into the densely surging human masses, the smoke and dust in the air and the blood on the ground. What a feast for hyænas and vultures when night should come! Napier was here and there wherever the line showed signs of giving, a fierce little old man of sixty, the very impersonation of belligerent energy, infusing the whole battle with enduring

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obstinacy. Often, it is told, the savage warriors, careless of death, assured of Paradise, impaled on bayonets, went on hacking still at the men who held them struggling. At last the Baluchis began to waver. The Scinde Horse and the Bengal Cavalry charged through their right flank among the trees and fell on their rear, completing their discomfiture and the bloody struggle was over.

And now, to-day, what a sense of quiet and desolation. A patriot hand* has raised over the field a tall stone monument which is visible for miles across the desert scrub. I have seen it when out shooting sandgrouse, a white pinnacle shining with an arresting glimmer across the waves of dull green tamarisk. On near approach it is seen to have a small patch of green turf fenced in by iron rails, and an iron plate on which are recorded the names of those who fell. Two or three old natives live in a mud-and-grass hut hard by and keep the grass green with a Persian wheel, which, turned by a camel

* Lord Curzon.

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walking round and round the mouth of the well, brings up the cool, gushing water to keep verdant this memory of one of England's great fights. It is seldom visited, but it is a satisfaction to know it is there—in starlight, moonlight, sunlight—an imperishable memorial. And one may take as symbolic of the peace that came afterwards to Scinde that well with its cool, sparkling water and embowering of trees, that oasis of the sandy wastes which meet the far skies all round.

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SIND.

"We have come to this uttermost plain of earth"—these words of the beginning of an old Greek play (I think the "Prometheus Vinctus") rang in my mind when we first set foot in Sind. A desert ranging far to the bounds of the skyline, stony, barren, and sandy, scored by ancient river beds, wherein the yellow sand lies deep and dazzling, where once the many-headed Indus river felt its way to the sea, broken by a grey shelf slab here and there, relieved by a shouldering hummock elsewhere, and hot as some dead scorched world that has wandered too near the sun, it arouses wonder whether this is the first phase or the last. Was it thus life began, or is it thus it will fade away when earth becomes another moon?

Conceive this desert by night, when a vast stillness reigns over it beneath the stars, and from lone rock to lone rock the hyæna prowls and sniffs the rude mounds of stones,

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with their bits of rag or sticks, which mark the last resting-place of the desert dead; or when the face of it is obliterated beneath a dust storm on coming with the speed of wild horses and the noise of brigades of artillery from the dun-dark quarter where it brewed. Mark how it has slept in the lap of centuries, no whit different to-day from the desert whose dust rose beneath the wondering legions of Alexander. It is so unashamed of its barrenness. It has the ruggedness of some old hero of the Sagas who was not afraid to show himself to the world as he was. In a word, it has character. Though all but featureless, it seems to know inwardly and be glad that "I am Sind; I can be no other place."

Most Englishmen know Sind best by the laconic telegram by which Napier announced that he had taken it.* Hard by this city where I am living, a hundred miles from the sea, is the old battlefield of Miani, the site of the fight where the Amirs made their last stand and, failing, gave occasion to the des-

*Peecavi.

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patch of the famous message. That was but seventy years ago. On the roll of Britain's dominions this is one of the youngest. What part she will play in the future is hidden, but it may be guessed it will be no unimportant one. With the development of the Persian Gulf which now seems inevitable (by what Power soever it be accomplished), the establishment of the Bagdad Railway, the growth of the vast grain fields of the Punjab which must find their outlet here, the increase of the internal wealth of the province through the spread of irrigation and improved agriculture—cotton growing, perhaps, especially,—Karachi, as a port, must have an enviable future and soon take rank as one of the gateways of the Middle East. For strategical reasons, too, as a port of debarkation for troops and stores for the frontier, should we ever again be involved in a war of any magnitude on our north-western boundaries, Karachi will become the cynosure of the world as Durban was in South African affairs. Sind is the Egypt of Asia. In many ways the parallelism between

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the two river-fed countries holds good. Like Egypt, Sind is redeemed from complete sterility only by a narrow ribbon of rich land lying along the river bed. Outside this it is arid. Like Egypt, it depends for prosperity, and even existence, upon the annual inundations of the river, which here takes place in June and July, when the snows melt among the ranges of the Hindu Kush. Its river finds its way to the sea through a delta of many mouths. A barrage is projected similar to that of the Nile, from which canals will be led off to bring into the cultivable area of the province many thousands of acres more.

The rainfall is slight, about five or six inches a year, but probably with further extension of irrigation works and afforestation this amount will increase. Away from the river is the unending sway of the desert. Into its pristine loneliness the small arteries of life begin to creep, and where they pass a wondrous fertility follows. The vital forces, dormant thousands of years, quicken to an activity which soils more favoured by nature cannot

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emulate. Here the black-haired, unkempt Sindhi, Baluchi, or Brahui plants himself with his goats and bananas. Here is his little patch of sugarcane, and here wander his lean grey cows. Here by the sandy track, among the ragged tamarisk bushes, where the quail and the black partridge call at early dawn and the sandgrouse gather in their querulous flocks at evening by the water holes, the camels pass and repass, with their jog-trot, like primitive monsters which have forgotten to die out with the mammoths and megatheria. All by the river edge it is scrub-jungle of camelthorns, tamarisk, and the spikey, tiny-leaved babul trees, the haunt of wolves, hyænas, and the hog-deer. Until lately a considerable revenue accrued from the gathering of lac in these forests, but quite recently this has been sadly diminished by the supersession by an artificially prepared substance of the natural product.

The country outside the civilised areas is wild and solitary, in striking contrast with the older portions of India, like Agra and Oudh.

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I have been out several times with a party on camels, and beaten the jungle with a score of lean and ragged peasants, evil-smelling and vociferous, and clad in so little flesh that we are forced to wonder how they can move at all, not to say tire us out in scrambling about the nullahs and jungle of their trackless wastes. Beating is a great spectacle. First come the jungle birds, francolins and pigeons and hawks and owls, flying distraught from the weird din behind; then two wolves of a light fawn colour, silent as ghosts, leap across the track, giving time only for a hurried snap shot; then a company of hyænas, and, last, a sounder of boar—fierce, bristling beasts, which dart across with humped backs, and crash into the bushes like eighteen-pounder shells. Last of all come the blowing, perspiring beaters, with their sticks and the small, long-handled axes which they carry as their favourite weapon. It is a strange experience, full of thrills, to sit there silent and waiting, and watch the animals come forth and pause with that wary jungle-glance to left and right ere they sight

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you and dive into the scrub. So silent are some that they seem often to melt out of sight rather than move out of it. It is difficult shooting, for at the best they give you but a snap shot, so thick is the scrub and so agile are their movements.

As to camel-riding, which is the main means of locomotion in Sind, there is only this to be said: it is better than walking. If you imagine yourself in a swing which is moving forwards as well as swinging, and is balanced with no absolute certainty of equipoise on a wall twelve feet high, you may form an idea of a camel ride. There is a desert round you with splintered babul trees on a level with your head. The sun is setting so as to strike beneath your helmet, and you have finished all the soda-water. You could suck the very stones for dew to moisten your throat, and the fate of Absalom threatens at every other stride. It is then you feel that the hunter is worthy his reward. Beautiful, fierce, and wild as Nature may be, you cannot help reviling her for her niggard largess of water. It is given to be thirsty in Sind.

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THROUGH THE BALUCHISTAN DESERT.

I.—The Start.

I write this from one of the dreariest regions in the world, sitting in my tent with the thermometer at 100 degrees and the glare of the eternal sand shooting in through the closed flaps. Sand and sandhills, stones and rocks; intolerable heat by day and biting chill at night; unquenchable thirst and unspeakable monotony—such is the daily fare of the desert voyager. I was recalled from leave in a hill station of the Himalayas by an urgent telegram bidding me join a caravan which was to start for Persia in a week. It was a business that had been pending some time, so I was not surprised. Perhaps a little annoyance at official dilatoriness was pardonable seeing that a little earlier information might have saved me much trouble and expense. But the Anglo-Indian official soon learns the philosophy of old Omar, who long ago must have

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had some prophetic vision of the Government that was to be—

> The ball no question makes of ayes and noes,
> But right or left, as strikes the player goes.

And so the ball was set rolling. Downhill it came through the verdant green woods and gorges of the outer Himalayas, by sparkling torrents and frothy cascades, pines and deodars, and mosses and ferns; down and for five days across the Indian plains, now hot and humid with the closing days of the monsoon; one night in the famous capital of the Punjab: and then, one early morning, up, up, up, crawling slowly like some giant centipede, the groaning train made its way into the desolate ravines of the Bolán.

Had Fate designed to impress me with the variety of scenery to be met with in our Indian Empire, she could hardly have played her cards better. Now, instead of hills all green, hills all red and brown threatened on every hand; now, instead of dashing torrents, cool and white, dry boulder-strewn beds glared up at the frail bridges crossing and re-crossing

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them with a grey gleam of hatred and cruelty. As the sun rose on that fierce disarray of arid hilltops and broken chasms, the heat reflected from them became intense. I sat by the carriage window, my mind divided between awe at the compelling respect inspired by such savagery and regret for the cool green mountain tops I had left. Here and there we passed a side-track running up the side of the hill to catch down-coming trains which should get out of control. At the little grey-stone stations stood khaki-clad sentries with loaded rifles and fixed bayonets. As the train pulled up they sprang to attention, and a small crowd of swarth hillmen, Afghans, Brahuis, Beluchis, got down and swaggered off the little platform with their long swords and knives.

At the head of the Bolan Pass is the small station of Spezand. From there a small single line has been built out in a south-westerly direction to Nushki, at the edge of the desert. Look in the map and you will see that this is just out of the south-east corner of Afghanistan. Follow a line from it due

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west, and keeping some fifteen or twenty miles south of the Afghan frontier, and you will find the line of our proposed route into Persia. For some 300 miles it runs thus, then projects itself straight into Seistan. There are three outposts there, each some three days' journeying apart and each to be visited periodically. From the end of the little line, which ends at Nushki, they are distant a month's journey by caravan. They are on the caravan route from Persia and Turkey into India, once, I believe, a very important highway, and now developing again.

It was evening when I stepped out of my carriage along with three or four tribesmen at the little place where the line stops abruptly in the sand. I found the escort of twenty Sikh sepoys and camels with their drivers all waiting. At once they proceeded to load my baggage and to move off. I myself waited with the two officers in charge of the escort, willing, all three of us, to taste this last drop of civilisation in the shape of the small mud bungalow which constitutes the "station," and

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at which the guard and engine-driver sleep before taking back the train to Spezand the next morning. Dinner done, we smoked a cigar each, then arose to our plunge into the desert.

We have been out a fortnight now, and the first impression of that vast loneliness has lost its force. But I recall vaguely how in the gloom at last the camels came and knelt in the sand before the door of the white-mud bungalow; how we all three climbed on to the saddles, rose up, and began to jog, jog, jog, with that long swing-swing pace which has carried us two hundred miles and has yet to carry us two hundred more. The guard and the engine-driver stood by the door to wish us good-bye, the smoky lamp burning behind them inside the room. As we moved away we looked back and saw that small smudge of reddish light still shining, then suddenly it went out. The guard and the engine-driver had gone to bed. We were alone.

For a long time we moved on in silence. Many thoughts and the attunement of the mind

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to the great solitude around us kept us from speaking. There were no stars visible, for a dust haze filled the whole sky, but in spite of that a certain luminousness prevailed and showed up in indistinct outline the few features of the desert. Here it was a rock standing out black against the comparative whiteness of the sand; here some meagre bush, all prickles and dry sticks. Beside me loomed the figures of my two companions on their camels. There was no sound except the jingle jangle of the little bells tied round our camels' necks. The great padded feet of the beasts falling on the sand made no sound. We fell into line along the track, a narrow whitish line which had been trodden for years by countless caravans before our own, and which glimmered up at us with a faint paleness from the duller untrodden ground. Suddenly the camel in front of me stopped, and its driver, a lank-haired Brahui, turned half round. I looked back, and saw there was no one behind me. My own had been the middle camel. The last had fallen behind, and was nowhere to

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be seen. Our camels stood stockstill, swaying their long noses to this side and that, while the drivers sent yell after yell across the dark waste before us. There was something very awesome in it. No voice answered from the black void. At last came a faint hail, and a few moments later the missing camel loomed up in the dark and halted beside us.

We went on again. It was like some long unending dream. Jog, jog, jog, jingle, jingle, jingle, with all the while a soft wind blowing like velvet on our faces—a wind that was neither hot nor cold, and that seemed to be ever fondling the cheeks with ghostly fingers in a touch intangible and unreal. At times an almost irresistible dozing came over us. One awoke with a start and a clutch at the saddle to save a fall. There still were the two other camels trotting along with their long noiseless strides and their snaky necks swaying at each step, there still was that eternal circle where the pearly grey of the starless sky met the dun waste of the desert. We presently entered some broken country, a

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jumble of low sandhills and rocky hummocks wherein the track often lost itself. Our camelmen, however, found it with all but unerring certainty. Only once were they at a loss, and we had to halt while one climbed down and made casts here and there until the track was found. They were true desert children, careless, casual, reckless, and light-hearted. All three were Brahuis, and wore their coal-black hair short at the back but falling long on to their shoulders. Their features were fine, of an Aryan cast; their complexions olive. One cannot blame people for neglect of the bath in a place where there is barely water enough to drink, so all I may remark is that sitting behind these gentlemen on their camels is not the least of our discomforts and is an experience one must grow accustomed to. Our mode of travelling has converted us into owls. At sundown we spread a mattress on the sand, and, sitting on the edges of it, eat our evening meal. The baggage camels are packed, and have gone on ahead with our Sikh escort. We mount and

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jog along all night till, near dawn, we approach our next water-hole, when we throw ourselves on the sand and wait for the baggage which we have overtaken and passed somewhere on the road.

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THROUGH THE BALUCHISTAN DESERT.

II.—A Halting-place.

We arrived at our first halting-place, after an all-night journey through the desert, a little before dawn. By the waning moon, which was getting low towards the horizon, we were enabled to descry our surroundings. They had little enough of charm, even by that light; but compared with later camping grounds which awaited us they made a heavenly oasis. Across the bare white plain a small thread of water meandered between deep and narrow banks, a canon done in miniature. Along it were small willows growing, not more than five or six feet high, and hard by was a kind of yard built of dried mud-walls for the accommodation of passing caravans. These serais, as they call them, mark most of the halting-places, but appear to be but little used. For the most part on halting, our camelmen

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allow their beasts to stray into the desert to pick up whatever grazing they can find, certain that they will return of themselves by evening. The water in the karéz, was saline, as are all the waters of this desert. The soil is impregnated with salts, which in places break out in a white efflorescence. After this we came across only one more karéz, all the other water-places being mere water-holes or pits dug out in the sand. The karéz is a peculiar feature of these arid tracts about the north-west frontier of India, being designed to convey water without allowing it to evaporate. The slender trickle which runs at the bottom would be attenuated to nothing long before it reached its destination without some such device. It takes its rise from some spring on slightly elevated ground and flows for the greater part of its course in a subterranean channel three or four feet below the surface. At intervals there are holes big enough to admit a man, and one of the father-to-son occupations of this region is that of karéz inspector and repairer. Sometimes the tiny river emerges into the open

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from beneath some overhanging ledge, but even yet its banks are so deep and so close that but little sunlight can percolate to it. When it draws near the end of its journey it is protected by a tunnel of small trees set close together over it, and so at last it reaches the melon bed.

From in and out the sentinel willows, the glitter of the tiny streamlet peeped invitingly, for already, though it was but our first day, the very demon of thirst had begun to assail us. We had to put ourselves on rations of water, and the knowledge that our water was limited, along with the dry, hot air, and the blowing sand, and the unfamiliar jolting of our camels created a thirst which for a week was well nigh intolerable. It amounted often to positive suffering. It is an odd thought, but I suppose no one in England has ever been really thirsty. Hungry he may be, but the very poorest can get water. Here at most halting-places there are water-holes, but the water is always salt and muddy. Before it can be drunk it has to be distilled.

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We carry with us two condensers, and one of our first cares each day is to set them going. A fireplace is built of mud, and some of the withered scrub gathered from the surrounding ground. The condenser itself is kept cool by water poured on it from the water-hole; the condensed water escapes from the small funnel and is caught in our water-bottles and cháguls.

The chágul is an implement of paramount value in these hot, dry climates. The hotter and drier the air, the cooler it keeps the water. It is practically a canvas bottle of such a texture that the water within can ooze slowly through to the outside surface and keep it constantly bedewed. There its evaporation by the hot, dry wind keeps the water within always cool, and often on a burning day, with a scorching wind blowing, a draught from the chágul feels as though it were iced. It is one of the few comforts we have. Each man carries a chágul and a water-bottle, and the problem of conserving the water in them through the long weary night to the next day is mainly a lesson of rigid self-restraint and

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abiding patience. We learn to appreciate the torment of Dives and the ultimate satisfaction of Lazarus. As a variant we make tea, and it is passable enough, but a curious green colouration which the salts give to it makes it uninviting to the eye. Our provisions are tinned, of course, and we carry sacks of potatoes.

Now I invite you again to the edge of that small karéz and the single line of green which relieves all that monotony of brown and grey. The moon is going fast as we pull off the rezais (quilts) from our camels, roll ourselves in them, and seek to spend the few remaining minutes of darkness in sleep. There is something soporific in camel-riding, in that and in the soft wind blowing in the face, the silence, the loneliness, the aloofness, the fatigue. Though the ground is lumpy, and there are two or three stones under the back, and possibly a scorpion is meditating on your slumbers from a neighbouring bit of rock, and a camel is gurgling and grumbling within a yard or two, these things avail not to

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disturb so well-won repose. It seems but a moment before the new sun is shining full and level into your eyes with a mocking valorousness of strength, a sheer bully, and crying out across the waste, "Who can withstand me? Think not to hide any longer in the skirts of night, for once again I am here." There is a noise of hammering, and they are running up the tents. The camelmen are squatting and blowing blue clouds from a hookah, which they pass from hand to hand. The camels are striding away like gigantic shadows into the scrub, seeking their insipid pasturage. By the karéz a band of nomad desert people, dirty and ragged, are filling their water-skins, driving a few lean goats before them. How anything finds sustenance here is a mystery. The whole place looks bare as a paving-stone, barer than a sea-beach.

The day drags on interminably. Hotter and hotter it grows; fiercer and fiercer comes the unrelieved glare. A wind gets up and blows the flies of the tents about, driving the sand into all corners and crevices, giving sore-

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eyes and cracked lips, and making life still more uncomfortable. The temperature inside the tents is 105 degrees. Till four in the afternoon it hangs thereabouts; then it rapidly begins to fall. The range between day and night temperature is very great, often as much as 40 degrees, and though by day in our tents the very lightest clothing is almost too much, by night, and especially after midnight, a great-coat is imperative.

In fold after fold of grey and brown and khaki the desert enfolds us. Between it and the sky is ever a great circle of haze of a dirty violet hue. It reminds me of the indiarubber ring round pickle jars, for the sky seems to rest on it like a lid. The ground varies. Sometimes it is yellow sand, sometimes grey sand. Here it rises into dunes with a few prickly dry bushes, here falls away in a great slope of stones. But go as far as you will, the same prospect lies ever before you. For hundreds of miles not a blade of true green to charm the eye and brighten the monotony.

All day long the "dust devils" stalk

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about the plain like gigantic genii of the Arabian Nights. When the air seems quite still they start up from the ground—long pillars of sand, ten, fifty, a hundred and fifty feet in height, with narrow stems whirling round and round, and broad spreading heads aloft. They are caused by meeting currents of air, which create vortices and uplift the lighter particles. It is obvious that where the ground differs so widely in its calorific capacities as it must here, where one patch is sand and another stone, one dark-coloured and one light, local currents will be continually on the move.

The long, hot day wanes; the whispering desert, darkening over before our eyes, beckons us once more. The camels come in from their pasturage, and kneel to receive their loads. The tents are struck. The bottles are all filled. The sky is one great sieve of stars. Before us stretch the darkling bands of the desert, brown and grey. Come let us be going, for though time be nothing here, there is the next water-hole to be reached before the

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dawn. The camels trot away, turned to the west. The wind, brushing a thousand miles of sand, blows soft and warm. On our right, as we travel, flames ever the tiny cresset of the North Star, pure, steady, unwinking, burning, nightlong, like some vigil fire, above the looming mountains of Afghanistan.

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THROUGH THE BALUCHISTAN DESERT.

III.—The Journey's End.

I pass over some days of our journeying, days of thirst and monotony, when we continued our habit of camping by day and travelling on through the cool of the night. The aspect of the desert changed but little. On some days our route lay through soft sand-hills, piled up by the wind into very strange geometrical figures of great accuracy of outline, often waved and rippled like true sea sand, and bearing a sparse vegetation of dried prickly bushes and salt-encrusted stalks of grass; on some days we moved easily over those long level beds of old alluvial deposits, smooth and white as English country roads, which in these regions are called pats; again the plain before us would be for a whole stage or more one appalling black waste of smooth, hard, shining basalt stones. One night, as we were traversing a pat many

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miles in extent, we came on a range of hills of a coal-black rock which contrasted singularly with the whiteness of the pat. The moon was nearly full, and blanched with a vivid whiteness the long miles of white hard clay which spread around us like a sea while it filled the valleys and recesses of the hills we were approaching with deep slumbrous shadows argent and black.

Our likeness to ships at sea was complete. Without a word spoken by any of us, we drew near those uninhabited heights which few have seen and none ever climbed. They ran out in beetlingness and rugged skerry into the smooth white plain whose long fingers in return ran up deep into their black bosoms. A great heat issued from them, as if hidden in some of those black folds wherein the night seemed to concentrate herself in an essence of living gloom must be the gate of Tartarus. Bobbing and jolting, as though borne on waves, we on our camels coasted along the fringe of the range, now and then making a slight detour to round some projecting cape.

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At times we almost thought to see some light-house perched on one of these headlands and throwing its warning beam across the wind-swept waste of the desert. But it was all a great void and silence, as of some ancient fire-made land blasted for ever by an irrefragable curse. We seemed trespassing on a tomb at whose great headstone, ungraven but sufficient, we had at last arrived to read the warning that this place was not for us.

Sometimes a camel died. Tough as they are, this appalling region tries even them. They perish in large numbers from a deadly disease called "surra" rampant all about the Persian frontier. It is a conventional thing in pictures of deserts to show a heap of grisly bones mouldering by the wayside. Here convention jumps with the reality. Scarce a glance forward or back can you take along the caravan track without encountering some such dismal monument. In the dry desert air, with the constant friction of the blowing sand, the bones are whitened as if they had been whitewashed.

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Some of the meteorological phenomena of the desert were curious and worth recording. The air was full of electricity, and it was impossible to touch a blanket without drawing long, vivid sparks from it. Often I have moved under my blanket by night and provoked a miniature thunderstorm with sparks three inches long and a perfect fusilade of crackling. In the morning vests crackle loudly when pulled off, and my khaki great-coat, of a very thick and heavy material, is like a Wilmshurst machine. The thermic variations in their range and suddenness are no less wonderful. We would start in the evening with a thermometer of 90 degrees, and it would continue hot till about midnight. About midnight the sand grew very cold, and when the camels knelt for a rest. and we got off our saddles for a short space to stretch our legs, we were surprised to find how chilly this earth-neighbouring stratum of air had become. On mounting again and rising into a higher stratum, it was hot and oppressive once more. About two or three in the morning a sudden

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change came in the air; it grew chilly and fresh with a touch of rawness. Thereafter until the sun rose the desert was cool and sweet, but with the very first new beams of day the scorching recommenced. During the early part of the night we often got temporary relief from a sudden gush of cool breeze which blew from the north-west for five minutes and then died down. Our camelmen called it the "Seistan wind."

Towards the end of our nightly journeys we would see the two pointers of the Great Bear sink in the horizon, and Orion arose with great glory. On one such night we entered a rocky gorge in which was a caravanserai, our halting-place for the day. Outside the mud walls in one corner we found the grave of a British officer, a sad and lonely place to rest in, unmarked and unknown.

The camelmen spoke of a great smoking mountain lying off our track some two days' journey to the south. I had no time to visit it, though much inclination. It must lie about on a meridian drawn through the western

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corner of Afghanistan and some sixty miles south of the border. All this region upon which we were now entering appeared to be volcanic. It was the Persian frontier, a part obviously designed by Nature to be a barrier between race and race, a labyrinth of broken and jagged peaks amidst which our track wound in the most intricate convolutions which none but those born to it could have followed. But it was a relief to the eye and mind alike. Here one discomfort which, as though to leave us with a lasting impression of the desert's cruelty, had beset us on the last four days now with our entry into the mountains came to an end. This was a strong and persistent wind blowing from the north-east which buffeted us day and night, driving the sand before it in swift-travelling clouds, scorching the face, cracking the lips, reddening the eyes, and beating us back as if with rude hands to repel us from the doors of its nursery. They call it the "Sau biz roz"—the hundred and twenty days, for all which space it blows without ceasing, day and night. Though we

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were generally free from it now, it still made its obnoxious presence felt whenever we passed the mouth of any great gorge, and the beetling crags above us were polished by its sand-laden gusts to the sheen of anthracite.

It was odd to see how in angles and hollows the white sand had been piled into drifts like snow-drifts on the hills at home. It was, indeed, a no-man's-land in which we now found ourselves. No living thing moved there. No eagle swam in the blue gulf above the gorge through which we were ever travelling. No raven croaked from the rocks as he did about our camps in the desert. No trees grew, no grass. No graceful rounded outlines prevailed as in the hills of our own fair and decent England, but each peak was like a tooth, and broken all about its sides into other teeth, savage and menacing as a shark's maw. It might have been some great city of ornate cathedrals whose spires and pinnacles had been shattered by earthquake to gross ruin. It seemed inevitable at times that we should end in disaster when our camels went balancing

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themselves along some rocky ridge or else descended an incline steeper than a house roof on sliding forefeet with their haunches almost doubled under them. In all this vast solitude there was not a drop of water.

On the fifth day of this journeying we reached the first of our outposts a mud fort with some mud hovels scattered about it. There were two more further on, but for the nonce this was the journey's end—four hundred miles from a train; a month across the desert. I question if there is an outpost of Empire more remote. The dim grey of the morning revealed the amphitheatre of mountains around us. A man brought out a string bed from the fort, on which I lay down in a corner of the walls and fell asleep.

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THE TUNGI.

TUNGI is the local name given to the great defiles which pierce the wall of mountains that separate us here, on the Afgho-Persian border, from the terrible desert of the north. The desert runs north to the shores of the swamps of the Helmund, 120 miles without a drop of water the whole way. Many a camel and its rider have entered its gloomy mists never to emerge. But of all tungis there is one which is *the* Tungi. It acquires this distinction, first, because it is the one at whose mouth our camp is located; secondly, because of its size. In America it would be called a canon; filled with deep green water it would in Norway be a fiord. Its walls are grim and huge, close set, so that in one or two bends the sun never strikes the bottom, and for the most part straight up and down. Here they beetle menacingly; here recede a trifle, and lead up to the fair blue sky in some tremendous glacis of rubble and

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shale. It makes many bends in its half-dozen miles of length, ere yet in a sort of splayed-out nullah it opens on to the mysterious haze-walled desert.

All day long there is a north wind shrilling through from end to end, often cold and biting, often sand-laden from the far plains of Seistan. By it the jutting black rocks are polished at the exposed angles like ebony, and the great façades which here and there in the wider places thrust themselves boldly in opposition to its course are worn and weathered into countless pot-like holes and crevices. The ancients would have invested it with a genius loci; so silent, so vast, so horrific is its long mane of jagged crests cutting the slit-like line of the sky. Often when I have been wandering in it alone I seemed to hear voices, and I have believed that it was no illusion or hallucination but the actual voices of men, perhaps at the camp two miles away, or of camelmen entering the mouth of the gorge no less distant, transmitted by the numerous smaller nullahs and ravines which circle about

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behind the walls, and, breaking down at last into the Tungi, all act as so many whispering galleries.

Not that the Tungi has no voices of its own. It has many. Some days the great wind sweeping over the gape of the chasm high overhead makes a sound like a conch, or as of some giant blowing across the mouth of a Gargantuan bottle, roaring, thrilling, and vibrating with weird undertones, which, merging one with another, become a burthen rather than a sound. There is the voice of the small salt-water stream which murmurs over the beds of grey gravel as it dives here beneath some riven boulder which has come hurtling from the top and lodged in the tiny channel, or topples in a small white froth down a rocky step or two, blithe and free as if it came from "haunts of coot and hern" instead of from the dull black, salt-encrusted earth at the gorge's mouth.

A strange little stream, strangely friendly in this land of exile, though its margins are white with accretions of salt and no grass or

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moss lives on its bounty. It is but a foot or two wide, with waters of crystal to the eye, but bitter as those of Marah to the taste. Yet one day I made beside it a gladdening discovery—a tiny piece of green such as could not be matched in all Baluchistan; not the dull, ashy green of the tamarisk or the sad anæmia of the camelthorn, or of the tabby-hued grass tussocks which strive for life amid the stones, but a piece of vivid, translucent maidenhair. It brought joy such as might spring in the breast of a Crusoe on the discovery of a tin of condensed milk. It seemed almost to redeem all Baluchistan. It seemed to be growing there of set purpose to remind me of those weary miles across the desert, to remind me also that elsewhere there were such hues in the world. It was a piece about the size of a man's hand growing under a dripping ledge where the sun never came.

Then there is the voice of Silence in the Tungi, and if you had ever been there alone with dark falling, the wind died down, and a star or two peeping palely out above the gap

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of sky, you would agree that that is a mighty voice. These are the everlasting sounds; but there are also sounds that come and go. Morning and evening the chikor calls from rock to rock across the hushed waterfalls. Suddenly the sound rings out with a metallic timbre, it leaps from rock to rock and hollow to hollow—chiker-ikker-ikker-ikker. . . . Then a hush. And the sisi calls with his small plaintive treble. Many a time I have heard them both, and, base ingratitude, cocked the hammers of my gun. But there is something to send a fiercer thrill through the blood, and that is, the harsh grunt of the ibex. When the moon is shining by night the lord of the giddy ledge and the deep abyss comes down for his drink from the salt-water stream, down through some steep chimney of rock or by some precipitous scree from the domains of the rioting winds; at other times he chooses the hour 'twixt dusk and night. Twice I have seen them then, as I have been stepping quietly from rock to rock, an indescribable sight of beauty. As I appeared they scramb-

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led up the rocks, sending down a dangerous shower on to me, and in a few minutes I could see their forms outline on the edge of the precipice peering down at me with their usual curiosity. On the heights above leopards wander and are to be heard at times, but except to drink they never descend into the gorge.

Rough as it is, the bottom of the Tungi is a track for camels, and I have traversed it several times on my own camel. A short time ago a desperate fight occurred here with a caravan of gun-runners. A dozen men were killed, and their graves, picked out with white stones, were made in a wide part of the gorge. Some escaped towards the Helmund, but perished in the desert. The Tungi has seen tragedy. It has all the stage properties for it.

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THE DESERT IN WINTER.

A FEW months ago I wrote of a journey through the Baluchistan Desert in the month of August. It was a record of discomfort and even physical suffering. It seemed at the time that the desert had done its worst. Torments of heat and thirst, of painful hot winds, of blinding dust, of weary nights of journeying through illimitable wastes of sand, of scarce less weary days in ovenlike tents made a nightmare not soon to be effaced. But it is a double-faced divinity this of the desert. Which face was the more forbidding I have yet to determine. For it is a singular thing how men condemn most the ills of the present and forget those that are past. In extremes of cold one thinks with longing of the blaze of the hot weather; in the reverberating heat one pines for the cold Arctic blast.

It was with a rapture few can know that we received orders to retreat. The criminal could not see the prison gates close behind

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him and behold once more the unfettered throngs of the street with a greater joy than we felt to survey from the last spur of the mountains that fortress which had locked us in for so many dreary weeks and months. It was a singular scene through which our small force retreated, there on the Persian frontier. On either hand were those same rocky crags on which we had gazed day after day, now scarred with drifts of snow. The sky that had been wont to blaze with a hot blue, now hung in heavy folds of leaden cloud. A bitter wind blew. A sudden freshet had broken up the track among the rocks, and the camels trod with uncertain and lagging steps. As we marched, we glanced back once at those dreary mud-walls embowered in the pitiless brown and yellow rocks; walls that seemed to groan and mourn with the pity of wasted life; walls not unstained, alas! with murder, even in our short stay. We thought of those we had left, who might have been marching back with us now. A little way and we passed a small ravine, at the mouth of which were two

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small heaps of reddish ashes—all that remained of two of us, for the Sikhs burn their dead. Then we left them for ever, and marched on in the cold and snow.

We had men broken by the scurvy which haunts all this region, and at every march end they came in to me crying out with the pains and frozen by the cruel wind. Some of the camelmen, poor, half-starved creatures, were paralysed and could only crawl. Some of the camels died; others strayed away in the night, and the men were too weak and ill to go and search for them. Fuel was scarce, and often there was no shelter, but the wind swept unchecked across miles of open plain and seemed to pierce the body with thousands of icicles. One day a terrible experience befell me. I was detained behind a little when the escort started on the fresh day's march. It was early morning, five o'clock and still dark. The ground was frozen hard as iron. Seeing a camelman in the act of rising, I got up behind him and bade him hurry on to catch the troops. On we went at

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a rapid pace, but still I failed to catch the tramp of the men's feet or the jingle of the machine-gun mules. I saw that we were on a rude track. On either side were low rocky hills which hid the desert from sight. I still continued on the track, for tracks there are so few, until at last the day dawned with a big splash of silver-grey right ahead of me. I told the camelman to stop, and for a space waited until the light grew clearer. Then I saw that we were lost. We must have come fully seven miles, and at that distance I knew we ought to reach a small fort called Amalaf. But before us and all about us was nothing but hopeless waste rolling away in fold upon fold to the bare hills. It was a Sunday morning, and I thought of the Sabbath breaking over England.

Luckily some inkling that I was astray had beset me even in the dark, and so I had been careful to mark the shapes of the hills and to take bearings. Far away now, one splendid dome of intense white, was the great rounded top of the Koh-i-Taftan, an extinct volcano,

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13,500 feet high, and at present occupied by a large robber band, 2,000 strong. I had some fear of meeting some of them, and I had nothing with me but a pocket revolver. The camel refused to budge a step of the way back; he stood there stock-still, gurgling and groaning as camels do when they are more than usually bad-tempered. In the end we had to get off and lead it by the nose-string. It was two hours before we again found our late camp, and then we picked up the track of our men and started again. I reached camp at last late in the evening, having had nothing but a gingerbread biscuit all day, which I found by good luck in my pocket. Before I got in, I came on two or three search parties which had come back to look for me. The Tehsildar, a native political officer, who was with the escort, met me on a hillock. He said I had come back from the dead, for it had been known that whole caravans had gone astray and never been heard of again; and how should I, ignorant of the desert, find my way where they had failed?

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It was not till I saw his face, grave and concerned, that I realised the peril I had been in.

It seems a bald account, but I have no space to describe it at greater length—how at last I did find the small mud fort at Amalaf, and how all the levies who occupy it had gone out to search for a lost camel which had strayed over the Afghan border, and only a crazy fool was left behind who neither could nor would give me any food or help; how I lit a fire of some odd sticks in the fort, and, having warmed myself, got on the camel and searched again for the track. It was the sort of experience that wakes you up in the night to put out a hand and feel the good, safe wall beside you, and to make sure there are no stars shining out in mockery miles away across the ocean of sand.

One day rain fell heavily, and it happened we had three or four days of pat—soft, sticky alluvium—flat as a lawn to cross. The camels slipped and slid, and three of them so injured themselves that we had to shoot

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them. Our tents were wet through. All day and all night the dreary patter of the rain continued, while about the mountain tops which overhung the long plain to north and south phalanxes of cloud amassed themselves. Each day we had to march; no delay was permissible. No one who was in it is likely to forget it. Nearly all were more or less affected by scurvy. We spent Christmas-day at a small caravanserai called Merui, a place of a few mud buildings lying low in a narrow gorge; and because it was Christmas we made a halt of a day, most of which we spent in bed.

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THE PERSIAN BORDER.

I SUPPOSE there is no spot in the Empire more remote than Robat, on the Persian frontier. To reach it is a month's journey by camel across a sterile and well-nigh waterless desert. It lies on an eminence above a great sweep of bare grey nullah or gorge, which looks as though it had lately been devastated by floods, though it is probable that nothing more than a trickle has meandered down it for centuries. There, in a rocky wilderness, sits the mud-walled fort with its six mud towers and its curtain walls loopholed and crenelated. The camels wander in and out through its gateway, and pass up and down the track they have trodden among the stones to their frugal pasturage; and the camelmen, dirty, unkempt, heedless, join in little groups on the threshold to discuss the happenings of their crude and narrow lives. At evening, when each jagged peak pierces the golden haze of the west with its fierce array of pinnacles, the camelmen

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kneel where they are, some in the nullah, some in the gateway, some on a cragside, as the hour has taken them, and, facing Mecca, make the evening prayer. A gleam of fire shines out from the base of a huge black cliff that fronts the fort across the nullah, where some camelmen, Afghans, Persians, or Brahuis, have newly arrived with their wares; and the echo of their voices comes at intervals as the wind dies and rises again.

To be there, one single sahib in all the alien host, with a thousand peaks around seeming all to concentrate, to imprison you and cut you off from your kind—this is a dream that grows to be a nightmare, if allowed to persist. No tragedy-monger could conceive a scene of sadder and more desolate grandeur; but to make tragedy there must be a human element of tragic potentialities, and the most imaginative would fail to invest camelmen and goatherds with the necessary play of emotional force. The rocks, the desert, the sky, the camels, and the goats that might have come out of a Sunday school book about the

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patriarchs, all might serve; but these things, so strange to my eyes still, though so often gazed on, will not serve of themselves. A caravan passed through one night; the next day it was looted. Five of its members were killed. Last night they were sitting here by the fort, talking over the fire. But now everything is as usual. There was some wailing of the women, then the pariah dogs started to bark. But no pomp, no flags half-mast, no black bands, no muffled drums. What happened to them yesterday may happen to us to-morrow. Life is from day to day; there is no past, no future. The only record of it all—the tale of long desert journeys, of months of patient wandering, of nights like these out under the rainless sky, of the treacherous shot from the hilltop, of the dried up water-hole—is all written at last in a little heap of white stones, with the dried heads of a few goats, or the horns of a gud (wild sheep) from the precipice, decorating without vanity some rocky niche of the wayside.

Summer drought, an appalling heat,

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swirling winds laden with grit, sweep down the nullah like the Furies let loose, wielding the scourges of all the vilest diseases that torture mankind—small-pox, scurvy, fevers, and those horrible sores which, if they do heal, scar for life; while Nature, no more relenting, allies herself with them, and calls up her hidden hosts of reptile and insect terrors. The last three miles of my journey here, my camel, which had carried me three days, gave out, and I had to walk the remaining distance to the fort over the loose stones of the nullah. Two levies were with me, armed with old Government carbines, and mounted on wiry little Beluchi ponies. They offered me their ponies but I refused. I had an obstinate mule of a camelman. It was his fault the camel had broken down, and I had a mind to teach him a lesson. I secretly noted his look of consternation when I got down to walk. The two levies looked at him angrily. The shame of a sahib who was in their care arriving at the fort on foot! They again urged me to take one of their ponies, but I again refused, and

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told them to ride behind while I walked. The track, which was all ashimmer with the glare, made two or three twists among the rocks, before it came out at the foot of the broad, steep nullah, at the head of which appeared the fort. Soon after I heard my sepoy orderly, who had been a little way behind with my baggage camel, calling the refractory camelman all the savoury titles in which Oriental tongues abound, and imploring things to happen to him which, if but one-tenth befall, will satisfy me entirely.

And now there is to be a railway coming through here—India, Baluchistan, Persia, Constantinople, and home. Is there? Looking out from the fort at that tumbled disarray of savage hilltops, it seems as likely there will be one on the moon. Yet come it will; it seems, on material grounds, so reasonable that it should, even while, as I say, it is so incompatible with the scenery. There is an Afghan fort a short distance away, lying in a deep-walled gorge among the mountains. From a peak above our fort to which I had climbed it

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was possible to see down into it, and to watch the Amir's soldiers who hold it. Between us ran the boundary of Persia and Afghanistan. It was an odd sensation to know that you could go down there and get your throat cut; and the only bar between was an invisible line.

When, I wonder, will the roar and whistle of trains carrying home to London the tired men of India awake at last the age-long sleeping echoes of this wild and savage region?

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AN INDIAN RIVER.

THE jungle, which is what they call all wild waste places in India, trees or no trees, scrub or desert, broken or flat; runs down in the gentle undulations of an English park to the beds of tall reeds that fringe the river. The river stretches out beyond, glittering muddily, suggestive of mugger * and those great turtles whose hideous forms you may see at times, if you are watching silently, scramble up the mud flats below the banks. Beyond is the island formed by a division of the river —a large island, diamond-shaped in the rough, some four miles by three. This part of the river is called "the Creek," and in the maps of a few years ago figures as a mere back-water. But nothing is more fickle than a river of Northern India, and in one season the carefully worked lines of the cartographer are so many lies through no fault of his own. And now this "Creek" is as large as the main

* Crocodiles.

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stream the other side the island and thrice as wide as the Thames at Oxford.

The island is a melancholy-looking place. A dead-level plain raised by steep mud banks ten to fifteen feet high, and covered with tall grass and reeds. By the margin are two small mud-huts where some grasscutters live. Glimpses of a silver-grey soil appear here and there in the banks to accentuate rather than relieve their ugly black monotony. Desolate as it appears, this river island, a dreary fen clothed with green and hoary in places with the white heads of the bulrushes, is held in no small esteem by the garrison as a harbour for the wild boar. Many a tusker has his lair in that swampy fastness, and when the rains are over and the ground is hard enough again, the thunder of hoofs and the jewel-like glint of tossing spear-heads challanges piggy to the battle for life which, stern old warrior that he is, he seems almost to enjoy. Soon, after a brief visit to the tanners at Cawnpore, his head, stuck on a wooden shield, will be grinning nightly over the snowy

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splendour of the mess table and his ancient home in the reeds be cold.

Beyond the green expanse of the island a few trees break the line of the far horizon and at evening time blend with the mists and sky. Then the sky glows with all colours that are fiery, but not in bold splashes as in England. Here in the languorous East they melt into each other—red, yellow, and gold, with all interminglings. All the sky shares in the sunset and the river takes the universal tint. The thin blue smoke rises from the huts along the banks and fills the soft air with a sooty fragrance. At rest, like tired river monsters, three clumsy barges hug the bank under the shelter of a huge old peepul tree. The other side the tree, winding round the immense buttress-like roots, runs the river road, now busy with traffic of the sunset. The dhobiman comes by, driving his donkey laden with all the laundry of the sahib; a troop of grasscutters on their mules; a creaking bullock cart; a couple of enormous rhinoceros-skinned buffaloes, whose leisurely tread and mild big

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eyes strangely belie the terror of their scythe-like horns; women with glass anklets and bracelets carrying their loads of sticks; syces leading their ponies;—all patient, calm, subdued, attuned to the universal repose.

Presently from the darkening island one long whining howl coils round the air like a whiplash. Another and another join in chorus. Echo answers echo. Echo is everywhere. It is time for the jackal to feed, and he does not care who knows it. Maligned as he is, he is not the only disturber. From the trees comes the harsh screech of the nightjar. He, too, is beginning his rounds; and a faint murmur of chattering birds comes from the reedbeds. A tiny light flashes in the foliage, and, looking longer, the eyes see another, for now it is lighting-up time for the fireflies. A larger, ruddier glow, with a small fusillade of sparks shines out on to the river a hundred yards away. It is a small fire of fallen sticks, and it is burning before a small manda or Hindu temple—a little square plaster building with tiny minaret and faded gilt tracery. With the hopeless

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irreverence of the Englishman, the Sahib reflects that it would make a capital summer-house in a garden at home.

But there is not much else of home about it all. Bird calling to bird across the marshes wakens no tender memories of green fields and placid streams, for the voices are unfamiliar and harsh. My bungalow is quite close to the river, but between the two there is an old building, once a Rajah's home. It is girt round by a wall now of a dull red hue and draped with moss and lichen. The wall is half-hidden by umbrageous trees, while vines and creepers trail promiscuously over it and down its sides. Shrubs flaunting big trumpet-shaped flowers, red and yellow, crowd about the foot of it, screening the grey squirrels from the eyes of the ever-circling kite. One may walk here for hours now that the October sun begins to relent, picking one's way from shadow to shadow, ever with a wary eye for snakes. Then, with a thud, a large red monkey springs off the old wall, clearing the foliage with a flying bound; a female follows, a tiny

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baby clinging to her back; and then thud! thud! thud! the whole troop springs on to the ground and goes bounding off in one long straggling line through the long grass. However great their hurry, I notice they never depart from the track of their leader; they may close up the line but do not break it. No doubt it is to minimise the risks from snakes, since whatever lies in their path is bound to be found by the leader, a wary old male, who would at once stop and give the alarm. If you attempt to follow they take to the trees. Further into cantonments they are less shy, and will sit impudently by the roadside as you ride past. But in this home of the old Rajah they are shy as ghosts, as if it had been deserted long ago solely for their benefit; and over the brokendown mandas, half hidden by tall grasses and creepers, on the tree-clad river banks, and about the copings of old wells long since run dry they swing and gambol and frisk, half human but wholly happy. When it is light in the early mornings, but before you are out of doors, they raid the compound,

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and in sheer mischief pull up all they can. My gardener has caught a small one, and keeps it fastened by a chain to a post of his hut in the compound. It is a sad little beast, very sulky and melancholic. He tells me it will die—not that he cares, but because he thinks he will induce me to buy it and set it free.

Walking down by this old wall, with the hot sun distilling all kinds of sweet fragrances from shrubs and trees, and big dragon-flies with gauzy wings flighting like arrows between hostile camps, we come out by the river close to an old octagonal tower built half in the water and half on the bank and inviting to its summit (which a tree-top enfolds) by a flight of broken steps. It is some thirty feet high, with a flat top protected by a low parapet. It looks up the river and down, in both ways across a vast reach of steadily flowing water come down from the high hills and the melting snows about Dualagiri, and still to flow a thousand miles to the sea. It brings a sudden realisation of the vastness of this peninsula,

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for, after all, it is one of the least considerable of our streams, and many who read this have never heard its name. Dark shadows lie under its banks, from which peep the walls of those old temple-like buildings which have been made only to be left. Here, at a bend, a shelf of dry baked mud, covered not long ago in the rains, runs out from the island shore; here, bare-headed, a Hindu is standing waist-deep in the shallows and throwing the brown water about his body with his small brass lota. Slow-winged birds cross over from bank to bank. The shadow of a tall palm flings out his clear image at a place where the current slows. And beyond all there is distance, the Indian distance, with its suggestion of imprisonment, not in a cell or other circumscribed place, but in sheer unescapable immensity. The water sweeps majestically under the foot of the tower, whose opposing wall throws off a long curve of wave under the foliage downstream. From this lofty outlook the island takes a different and improved aspect. Patches of sugarcane and small beehive huts and

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a herd of black buffaloes redeem its swampy barrenness. Life is not lacking. The kite is there circling; the vultures are gathering and settling over one mysterious spot. Many wading birds haunt the mud banks and dig in the black ooze for worms and molluscs. Others more timid creep unobtrusively in and out the beds of tall reeds. From morn to dark flocks of green parrots fly screaming across the water, always in a hurry, yet with no more important purpose than to reach a fresh clump of fig-trees of which the leader has suddenly bethought himself.

Far different are these great birds that come when the twilight is almost dead, a mighty wedge-shaped phalanx that looms up out of the dark and passes over the head of the drifting bargeman, calling to each other as they fly—the lordly white geese come down from the barren tundras of the north to share our own cool winter while their nurseries are deserted and locked in snow. They melt away into the dark, while the bargeman poles his craft into the bank and ties up for the

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night. His fire sparkles, glows warmly, leaps up, tosses the sparks into the cavernous foliage of the peepul tree overhead, then dies to a white sheen of hot embers which, with his own lean form and bony face and the dim outlines of his leaky boat, the darkness frames like a picture of which it is proud.

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THE COMING OF THE MONSOON.

Two monsoons yearly visit India, the south-east and south-west, the one from the Bay of Bengal, the other from the vast tracts of the Indian Ocean. The one inundates the plains of the Ganges and bursts on the Nepalese hills, the other deposits its stores first upon the Western Ghats, carrying what remains to the Punjab and Cis-Himalayan Western India. If either fails anywhere, there is famine for the next year. But it is a local deficiency only; there has been excess elsewhere, for the annual volume of water brought by these storms is probably constant. Its distribution is naturally liable to variation. When all India lies panting after four months of rainless scorching heat, when the ground yawns in great fissures and all the nullahs are run dry, when the jheels are baked bottoms of hard clay indented with the last footprints of the buffaloes cast as in iron, when the dust-devils pirouette all day and the hot winds

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curl and crack the paper on your writing-table, when the punkah swings all night above your head as you lie uncovered on the charpoy, when the birds are all hopping under the trees with gaping beaks—all save the brain-fever bird, whose fiendish cachinnation rings out in mockery like that of some hell-bird gloating over the souls of the damned, just when the end of the world seems at hand and all is about to dissolve in flame, a little change comes; only a sign, but it is enough.

We human beings can support anything with hope. And there hangs out in the sky, for all those weary months a silvern canopy of glowing heat, the banner of the advancing hosts of the sea. Out on the brick-brown lawn at the club a dozen red eyes are watching it through the dust haze. A few cirrhus clouds, their edges encrimsoned by the setting sun. Low in the west they lie, spying over the trees like scouts. Then again the hot, breathless night, but somehow it seems less hot. And next day again; but a whole patrol has come up out of the west. Always at evening time,

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as though they waited to make their dispositions by night. And day by day they grow, like an army with a wary general waiting to assure his position before delivering his attack. But we know they are there behind, the hosts of the sea, and we know that already the fierce wild gorges of the Ghats are re-echoing to the artillery of the thunder and streaming the whirling cascades down their parched ravines. We know that the sea is lifting in Bombay, that all the trim yachts are laid away, that the glittering expanse of island-studded water on which the eye dared hardly linger before is now sullen and ashen-grey. And they are coming here now, those relieving armies of the sea, by battalions and brigades and divisions and whole army corps, before which these dust-devils will scamper away like the chastised Afridis of the north. From the end of June or early in July these signs display themselves. Then, one night, with startling suddenness it comes, the long-awaited conflict. Twice I saw it burst, the monsoon; for the day after it had broken in a place in the Punjab

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I got orders to go down to Lucknow, and was in time to see it burst there. I counted myself happy, for these elemental phenomena stir the blood beyond any artificial excitement created by man. A storm is one of the grandest things in nature, and the monsoon is the grandest of storms.

I had my charpoy placed in the verandah that night, for dense black clouds were gathering at nightfall, and at intervals fierce gusts of wind swept up tons of dust and strewed it everywhere in the open. As I rode to mess the avenues of the cantonment were unwontedly dark and not a star was shining. Now and then the heaven opened with the suddenness of a camera's shutter, disclosing through sullen banks of clouds great veils of bluish light. The wind swept through the neem trees, fiercely rattling their dry pods and leaves. A sense of awe and of impending strife was in the air. The flickering flashes revealed the forms of natives squatting in the doorways of their huts in the big, open compounds.

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I returned to the bungalow about ten. It was a large, rambling place, which I shared with two other officers. About it was a great waste compound laid out with water channels and shaded in places by neem and mango trees, while from it a flight of steps led up to the flat roof. Round about it was a deep verandah, on to which opened the many doors. It was an intensely hot night, but in a little I fell asleep. Soon afterwards I vaguely awoke. The whole long verandah was palpitating with flickering blue light, while a noise as of hundreds of guns crossing a pontoon bridge heralded the thunder. Suddenly a splash or two of rain came down, and then it broke as if a dam had burst. In the ghostly light, which kept coming and going, I saw all the trees tossing their branches like mad things. All about the bungalow doors were banging and carpets blowing up, and the wind was howling among the punkah ropes. Between the flashes the darkness was supreme. The force of the rain was such that the spray from it driving into the verandah soaked the bed in

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a few minutes. I tried to strike a match so as to escape, for I disliked to set foot to the ground without a light on account of snakes, which at such times are apt to come into houses for refuge. In the end I had to risk it, and spent the rest of the night on the floor of my bedroom. Towards morning the crashing and roaring died away in subdued muttering, and the sun rose over a flooded countryside.

The transformation was unique. At the little station that morning I got into the train and travelled south. All the flat Punjab plains were a shallow sea, islands of herbage cropping up here and there on which stood long-legged storks, while countless hawks wheeled in the air overhead. It was soon clear why these birds had foregathered, for on every bit of marshy ground and even on the railway embankment were countless frogs of a bright yellow-green hue and as big as a strong man's fist. Already the country seemed revivified, and when the train glided into the green gardens of Amritsar, from whose screens of foliage domes and cupolas shone dazzling

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white in a sky of serenest blue, no one would have believed that in India there was such a thing as drought. And over the Sutlej we ran, where beneath us the mortar-coloured waters were chasing each other in furious glee and whelming fathoms deep the dry sands where yesterday the buffaloes stood up to drink. Everything was alive and superabundantly joyous. Big clouds were lowering over Lucknow, and those resplendent Oriental buildings, tombs of ancient kings and queens, that give to the city the air of a gigantic cemetery, stood out ghostly and statuesque, contrasting their alabaster fretwork against the colossal background of slate-coloured gloom, as though about to clothe themselves in a perennial mourning for the tragedy of fifty years ago.

Next day again I saw the battle open. It was afternoon. Down the hotel drive the runnels of rain water sped to the roadway like torrents, and the most curious sight was made by the long water-spouts which projected from the roof and which were all shooting forth great curved streams one behind the other with

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the force of a fire hose. Standing in the verandah, I watched the crowds of natives running up and down the roadway, their scanty rags so drenched and clinging as to look like second skins. They were shouting to each other and to themselves. Many were coming out of their booths clad like Adam to take their baths, as no doubt, Adam took his. At dusk it held up for a little and a most extraordinary chorus began. From all the waste ground covered with those mud-buildings which litter such places in an Indian city, at the very back doors of the hotel, where muddy pools were creeping about the doorsteps, rose up that batrachian chorus which at school it once fell to my lot to try to imitate on a "speech day," when we were doing the "Frogs" of Aristophanes, Brek-ek-ek-eks-koax-koax! Here it was again, the same sound that caught the ear of the Greek more than twenty centuries ago. Scores of great fat bull frogs come from, heaven knows where. No wonder people used to think it rained frogs sometimes. They kept it up all night, one great fellow booming away

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every other second with a noise like a motor horn's. At that time it did not seem to me such outrageous tyranny that the old French nobles kept their serfs beating the marshes all night to subdue this reptilian thanksgiving.

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KASAULI: A HILL STATION.

ONE moves often in India, and, for all it is so slow-moving a country, the unexpected happens with startling rapidity. Here am I who a week ago was sweating under a punkah in the plains now perched on a hilltop seven thousand feet high, amidst pines and cool breezes, and that with only the briefest notice of departure. All India knows Kasauli. It is not only that it is a pleasantly quiet hill station, but here is planted the Pasteur Institute, which I imagine might claim to have saved more lives than any building of its size in the world. Down in the plains my dog went mad. I watched him two or three days, poor brute, hiding under chairs, making vague snatches at the air. He tore up the rush matting on my floors, scratched up the cement in the bathroom. Then he snapped at my hand and ran off at once with his tail between his legs as though conscious of having done a horrid crime. In India the "sweeper" looks after

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the dogs. It would spoil the caste of any other. I told him to keep it shut up, and next day went again to see it. It was raving, champing its jaws, and dribbling foam. I chained it to a sapling near the door, and asked a fellow-officer to shoot it for me. There is something peculiarly devilish in the fate which can transform the most faithful of animal friends into the begetter of the most appalling death. But so it is. I sent the brain to Kasauli, and next morning started myself in company with another officer of the regiment, who had had a sore hand licked some days before.

After a day and night in the train we glided into Umballa in the Punjab. From that a slow train, climbing all the way, took us to Kalka at the foot of the Himalayas. Another train in miniature runs from Kalka to Simla, which crowns a not far distant peak, but to Kasauli itself the only access is by ponies or dandies carried on coolies' shoulders. At the station we hired our ponies. The coolies behind, laden with our packages on their heads,

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started at their shuffling gait, kicking up the dust which lay inches deep on the track. The little station, with its snorting little engine, was left behind. Before us rose enormous shoulders of hills round whose giddy edges we could see the narrow paths winding, whose lesser slopes were laid out in tiers of green terraces, and whose gorges were purple shadows of Plutonic profundity. There seemed no animal life except that of lizards, which darted from every baking rock. Up and up the narrow dusty path ascended, now crossing a wooden bridge thrown over some rocky torrent bed, now flanked by a great wall of black rock in which the fuse-holes of the blasters seen at every few yards told of the labours of those who made the road; from the one side a slope covered with cacti climbed skyward, from the other, guarded by a low parapet of stones, an almost sheer declivity went down to a cactus-choked ravine. We had nine miles to go, and after three we began to count the furlongs, which were marked on small wooden posts all the way. Some two

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thousand feet up we came on a rocky recess from which a spring babbled into a stone trough. Moss and small ferns grew in the crevices wih a delicate greenness refreshing to the eye. We gave the ponies to drink, then went on. No need here to repeat all that thirsty ride. The great ravine, which, turn as we might, seemed ever just below us, was like the stifling crater of a volcano. There was little vegetation except the ugly spike-studded cacti which grew out of the ruddy-brown earth, and they were everywhere.

We must have been some six thousand feet up when the track went round an abrupt corner overlooking a tremendous ravine. It gave on the most wondrous panorama. Between the shoulders of some lesser heights opened up a vista of the Punjab plains. A blue, smoky mist brooded over them, a curtain of mystery behind which lay all India—India and all it means, Bombay and Calcutta to Cape Comorin. We stood there like Jove on Olympus watching the wars of the world. Beneath us those millions were toiling, fainting, dying in the

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ceaseless misery of the Indian race; thousands of temple bells were renewing for the day the worship of India's sons. Before the haze curtain a great river lost itself in endless reticulation amid miles of dun sand, and here and there the sun's rays flashed on it as on a mirror. Looking nearer we saw here and there the small and narrow terraces whereon the hill people grow their crops, laid like ribbons along the lower hillsides. Close by were queer stone dwellings, half houses, half caves, about which tiny figures were busy.

After a ride of some four hours we came at last to Kasauli. First there is the inevitable bazaar of an Indian town—a collection of tin buildings straggling up and down on various points of rock. Over a stone bridge which crosses a dry nullah the road winds up through a second bazaar, a small place of open booths lining the roadside. A gust of strong wind would send them toppling into the nullah. There are sweetmeats and cheap haberdashery laid out, so that it is comforting to see that even here one will not want for

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such trivial but elusive articles as a collar stud. There are the small barracks of the soldiers sent up here from the plains, the signalling school, a telegraph office, then the church—such a church as would please you even in rustic England, built of soft red stone and comfortably embowered in trees and shrubs. It is a pleasant feature of Kasauli that you can see so little of it at once. The roof of your neighbour's bungalow is on a level with the floor of your own. The roads are more like a distorted switchback than an ordinary highway. Behind my bathroom door at a distance of three yards rises a steep wall of rock with a small pine or two clinging to it. There is ivy beautifully green and fresh climbing up the doorpost, and in the niches of the rock I can see a few dandelions. Going right through, my bedroom door opens on to a stony path leading steeply down to the hotel dining-room, and across that to a steep descent which looks like a sea of pine tops. I am not to forget the wild cherry tree, full of glossy red blobules, which stands by the door and

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partially obstructs my view of the distant snow peaks, nor yet the sparrows who hold their parliament in its branches. Down below I heard an owl hoo-hoo-hooing all night in the pine trees. At times a jackal answered him. In the morning a cuckoo began calling. Sweetest of sounds is the sough of the wind in the pine-tops. It rises and falls and invades the air with the soft roar of the sea rolling up the pebbles on the beach—

> One gradual solitary gust,
> Which comes upon the silence and dies off,
> As if the ebbing air had but one wave.

One rises in the morning fresh and cool, without the appalling anticipation of a hot-weather day in the plains. There is mist in the valleys; cloud caps on the multitudinous peaks which lift all round like the crests of a choppy sea. Above all, there is greenness for the eye to gladden the brain, and the fresh-distilled aroma of pine needles for the nose. Even the somewhat painful treatment at the Pasteur Institute cannot lessen the joy of these things to a mind that has been

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tortured for long months with dusty plains and trees on which the leaves rattle harshly as castanets at every fiery breath. Across all the white wastes of the silent Himalayas comes this invigorating wind, and at every corner you meet it somehow, and all night it steals in with just a breath of pine odours and just a touch of the glacier through the open door of your bedroom like a silent angel of healing.

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OF BUNGALOWS.

Some who contemplate a life in India, and many who through ties of friendship or kinship think sometimes upon some other's life out here, must wonder at times what fashion of dwellings are these bungalows. I might say a bungalow is a house you live out of. At any rate you so far reverse the arrangement of home that you stay inside all day and sleep outside at night. At home you look to your roofs to see they are raintight; here our only concern is to have them suntight. Disabuse your fancy of those trim tin bungalows which preside over seaside golf courses. This is a big, low, rambling building, with mud-walls thick as a mediæval castle's, all windowless, a high ceiling crossed and re-crossed by bare rafters, cement floors, and doors which rarely meet when fastened. The aspect is dismal in the extreme when one enters. The dark-brown painted doors admit through various cracks shafts of fierce light which fall in big

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bright splashes on the blue-washed wall; fragments of dry earth drop from the ceiling, whither the white-ants have carried it to make their long, thin tunnels and eat away the woodwork; the flooring is cracked and holed and covered with red dust; the four panes of glass in the door which opens on the verandah are pasted over with brown paper to keep out the glare and heat. Then, if you are a bachelor, comes the furniture-wala from the bazaar with the furniture you have hired. He disposes it in various corners—a writing-table, an almirah, a charpoy, a chair with long arms for your legs to rest upon, a dressing-table, a mirror gone at the joints. The rest of the space is occupied by trunks, boxes, uniform cases, all much belabelled to recall to your solitude memories of many journeys. All the rooms are in direct communication with one another. There is rarely a hall or passage in an Indian bungalow. The big rooms are within, so ordered as to have, if possible, no outside walls to be exposed to the sun.

Early in the day your bearer shuts all

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the doors and lets down the chicks (reed mats) over the verandah. You pass the day inside, from ten to four, with such innocence of clothing as you can compass, lying in the long chair or on the charpoy, with the long curtain of the punkah flapping to and fro overhead and the monotonous creak of its ropes in your ears. As you lie your eyes follow the long rope which slackens and grows taut and runs easily through the little pipe in the wall. Outside the punkah coolie squats on the brick floor of the verandah and coughs raucously from time to time. When his dozing becomes sleep and the movements of the long curtain grow less and less, if you are not asleep yourself, you galvanise him with a yell of "Kencho!" (Pull!) superadded to various adjectives. From without comes the roar of the hot wind as it sweeps over the parched compound, and the clamour of the hot-weather birds. So you lie and drip, waiting till, in the waning afternoon, your bearer shall fling open the doors and declare you free. Then in your dressing-room, which you share with many

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familiars in the shape of lizards, spiders, and centipedes (who have certainly a right of prior occupation), where are the long shelves of boots and shoes, and the tree with your saddlery, and the lamps which the bearer occasionally remembers to fill, you sit and shave, the ever-useful servant flicking at your bare back with a towel to keep the flies off you. It does not sound romantic. No, it is not.

Seen in England you would call it a barn, this great blue building of many doors and steps and verandahs, and the red tiles layered on the roof; out here, with the palm trees in the compound, the huts where the servants live, and the bougainvillea throwing its clustered purple around the pillars, it is picturesque enough to call a home. And at evening when you return from the club, riding through the compound wherein the luminous night is sweet with essences of fragrant shrubs and seeing the soft glow of the lamp shining through the open door, you may well pause, filled with a soft sense of beauty and peace. In a corner under a mango tree, which throws up its dome

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of heavy leafage against the starry sky, the bhisti is crouching over the wood fire and making warm in an old kerosene oil tin the water for your bath. Inside, moths, beetles, and mosquitoes are holding high revel about the lamp. This is one of the pleasant hours of the day. The exhaustion of the heat has given way to a gentle fatigue, and you can contemplate dinner ahead with some degree of enthusiasm.

There is still the compound to visit. Come with me now and see it by starlight, wherein presently we shall lie asleep. A big space of several acres divided from the domain of your neighbour by a thick cactus hedge. The ground is hard-baked clay, scattered here and there with pale weedy grass, spare as the hair on a monk's tonsure. From the two white pillars at the entrance the long drive sweeps up to the verandah. Something is moving stealthily across it, a slim, unobtrusive shadow, something that wraps the night round it as a cloak, yet fears these open spaces about the dwellings of men—a hungry jackal. Pres-

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ently a long-drawn Yow-ow-ow-owe strings out in a procession of goblin notes from about the purlieus of the old king's palace hard by. Overhead, the crooked arms of trees thrust up their knotty fingers towards the sky. Some of them grow plainer and yet more spectral, as behind them a circle of hazy gold rises above the far rim of the big maidan and inundates the low-hung stars. The moon's edge cuts into the sphere of darkness, and quickly growing hangs like a polished shield regnant over all. Here are my flower beds now, and in them, their modest hues of pink and white and purple just discernible in the gentle glare, the trumpet-headed petunias which the máli* has watered into life. There are three of them by the drive just fronting my door, and a few here and there like islands on the clayey expanse beyond; these flower beds, or, as I must call them here, flower pits. For again we reverse things here, and instead of raising the soil to let it drain,

* Gardener.

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when we grow things here we must dig it into holes to retain the water of very life.

Of all things in my domain what chiefly pleases me is the system of irrigation by which the máli tempts things to grow. I suppose he and his fathers have done it for ages, through the days of Akbar and the Great Mogul, everywhere in the thirsty East. The two blindfold bullocks trudge round and round on the little brick platform about the mouth of the well, and the limpid water comes up splashing in the earthen pots as they go up and down in an endless chain—down into the dark, cool depths and up again to empty into the stone tank. Morning and evening the grumble and squeaking of the big wooden wheel salutes your ears. And thence along a miniature embankment all the length of the compound, with a gentle slope, it passes, the bright, shadow-flecked stream, to the small squares and parterres which the máli has walled off with tiny banks of soft mud, a lump squelched on here and another there, diverting it till all his plots have had their shares.

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THE SAHIB'S BURRA DIN.*

No jingle of bells awoke the Christmas morning here in India. Above the dusty maidan† covered with its short burnt-up grass the globe of the sun climbed slowly and darted its level beams in at the doorway of my bungalow. A heavy mist was dispersing; it hung in flat blue layers here and there like something more tangible, cutting the mango trees and distant palms in two. A solitary horseman was galloping towards the lines, raising clouds of dust like smoke from his horse's hoofs. The garrison gun boomed out its solemn shocks of sound, throwing the morning stillness into convulsions of ponderous vibrations, into which the merry bugles entuned their ringing reveilles. All was silent again, and through the doorway, as I lay on my charpoy, I watched the sedate minas—the Indian starlings—perkily hopping in the com-

* Literally, Great Day, *i.e.*, Xmas.
† Big square.

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pound and the repulsive vulture waddling here and there. A grey squirrel scrambled up the trellis over the door, eyeing me suspiciously. I looked about vaguely for the familiar holly, but the glossy leaves and the scarlet berries would have been nought without frost and snow, and there was no reason why I should prostitute such sacred things on the bare plaster walls of an Indian bungalow even if I could have had them.

My soft-footed bearer came in, a wiry little brown-faced, twinkle-eyed man, behind him my kitmutghar bearing the tea and toast of the Indian "chota hazri." Eternal yet necessary abomination! Tea in an enamel teapot and toast burnt over a bit of smouldering charcoal. "Huzoor, burra din hai!" (Excellency, it is the great day.) "Salaam, sahib." He had talked of the "burra din" all the night before while he was dressing me for mess. On that day all the sahibs went to church. On ordinary occasions when one or two spinsters have come into the station for the cold weather, an access of religious enthu-

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So the servants departed, everyone to his

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own place, the syce to the stable, the grass-cutter to the river bank, the dhobie to the ghat by the river where he washes my clothes by banging them on a board and rinsing them in the water (blissfully heedless of the half-burnt corpses which have as yet escaped the crocodiles), the bhisti with his big leather mussack to the well, and the sweeper to the brush with which he alternately sweeps the dust from the drive into the bungalow and from the bungalow to the drive. Then came another deputation. It was from the bazaar in the infantry lines—a score of bunnias with their children hanging about them, and each bearing a small cushion. A dour old man with skinny brown legs presented a gift of fruits and native sweetmeats on a big brass tray. Then each came forward with his cushion, on which was laid a bright new rupee. I touched each coin in turn until they had all passed—may it bring them the increase they expect, but I fear I am no Midas. My hospital staff came next with another tray of fruit, a formidable array this time, a painful reminder of the

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Gregory powder which about this season used to issue forth from maternal cupboards. There were guavas and bananas and oranges and nuts and sweetmeats, with a big sugared cake in the midst.

If the morning, when the mists still lay about the face of the night-chilled earth, bore some faint resemblance to the Christmas morn at home, inasmuch as it was possible to shiver on climbing out of the charpoy, the waxing day soon dispelled all the simulation. By midday the temperature would have done credit to an English mid-July, and would have evoked comments from the newspapers on the "heat wave." The mercury stood at 78 degrees in the shade. The sky was cloudless and showed no promise of the "Christmas rains." Oudh has fallen on evil days these last two years, especially this district of Oudh. The summer before last was dry; last monsoon brought only half the normal rain. Now the Christmas rains have failed. And the crops are all athirst and withering. The wells are drying up, and those who know express gloomy

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forebodings of cholera and dysentery in the spring. It is a small thing to speak of when to the rest of humanity here the issues are of life and death, but what troubles us sahibs, is that the jheels, famous for wild fowl the province over, are now dry and untenanted. The shikaris go out and bring back mournful reports. Even their optimistic vision fails to descry duck swimming about on hard-baked mud.

Nature is very cruel to her children here. It does not take long to realise what a land of economy India must be—economy in trifling things. You may walk through groves and never pick up a twig, for every one is gathered by the village women. For every kind of refuse there is a scavenger; and for the refuse of the scavengers themselves there are still claimants. Thus, through ages of imminent famine, the Indian has learned to be parsimonious and a cherisher of trifles. It shows itself in all his dealings. These crude puerilities are annoying in the extreme till you grow used to it. It all spells poverty. If you

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think through your irritation it brings you to the heart of the case—that India, as Macaulay says, is a poor country. Recently some of the regiments had gone out to a shooting camp on the shores of a big jheel some seventy miles distant, close under the Nepalese mountains. Two or three of the ladies went with them.

In the afternoon I got a "chit" from one of the latter asking me to come over and see a small outcast whom she had taken under her care. At night, when they had all crept into their tents, a small girl, Hindu, used to steal out, like a little jackal, and cower over the embers of the camp fire. They found her there by accident one night just before breaking up camp. She was an orphan and quite alone in the world, starved to a skeleton. She was only ten years old, with a quaint little black face, but with all the mien and dignity of a woman of this country. The lady brought her home, and I am glad to say she is recovering, though she still has difficulty in taking food.

The day draws to its close—for all those

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dark-hued millions toiling in sun and furrow no different from other days, for us only a little. The mind of the exile travels back to lit-up windows shining across white-palled drives and through the laden boughs of silent shrubberies; to the porch made gay in the dark by festoons of paper lanterns; to shining floors and fern-draped alcoves. In the late afternoon the throb-throb of a native drum breaks the repose of the air, and the slanting rays of the sun shine on a little group of white where they are carrying a dead man down to the burning ghat. Later the thin blue spirals rise up from the river bank among the trees, betokening that for one at least all festivals are done.

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CHARON'S SHEEP: THE MUGGER OF THE GANGES.

In the East man moves slowly, nature moves quickly. When dissolution comes, there is no long mouldering. Here Charon waiteth not at the ferry. The soul that saw the sunrise is already upon the livid fen when the torn earth-clouds flame with the glory of sunset. Those who shrink from the fall of a shadow across their food recoil not from the ghastliness of these live graves—the mugger, or crocodiles, of the Ganges river. A quick swirl in the broad waters, a long-ridged back that cleaves backward, a snap and another swirl, and the bubbles go skimming down, down, till they break. That is finished. What is happening down in the mud at the bottom it is not for human eyes to see. The Almighty is merciful in the veiling of eyes. Now, after some days, when the water has gone from the long, low bank before the ghat and left naked to the sun that hog's back of black mud, a round white

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globe turns a pair of eyeless sockets to the steps where pilgrims come to bathe, where once it went to bathe itself. He, the mugger, knows it; he is the keeper of that museum of bones on the bank; back-bones, thigh-bones, hip-bones, great and small, they all lie there and wait, wait for the last trump to call them to gather together and advance.

They wax and grow fat, these sheep. No one disputes their prey. It comes to them unfailingly. In yon crowded city of stucco and spires all who wander will come eventually to them, to them or to their children; and night by night the lights that twinkle in the bazaar and the pungent incenses that drift riverward remind them that the crop is always standing and the Reaper ever busy. Cholera or plague, it is all one to them. It is all one, the silent midnight splash by the temple steps or that which follows the blue smoke winding skyward in the glare of the day.

There are two kinds of muggers—the mugger proper, the big blunt-nosed man-eating saurian, and the long pointed-nosed

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fish-eater known to the natives as the "gharyal." The man-eating mugger does not live exclusively on man, nor is the fish-eater a total abstainer from human flesh. But the distinction sufficiently indicates their respective outlooks on life. He of the ghats and bridges, who lies log-like just where the tail of the broken current smoothes off into oiliness, so that all jettison must pass his inspection before it floats away into oblivion, has a blunt, full nose like the prow of a barge and a mouth armed with teeth jagged, yellow, irregular, chisel-like, unescapable. He is ready for business when he reaches ten feet or so, though before that he can find stowage for a native child, or even a young widow of tender years, glass anklets and all. With wariness he attains to seventeen or eighteen feet. He knoweth full well the difference between white and black, a rifle and a bamboo lathi.* His back is one long sheet of studded plate armour, and for all it is so far distant from its central agency his tail knoweth its affairs. It can

* Iron-shod staff which natives carry.

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knock a pony off its feet like a lightning shock. He is the mugger proper; he is the old man of the ghats where the women come down to bathe, timorous creatures, who stare at him while he takes his pick. He knoweth each brick in that crumbling wall along which the current gurgles and sucks, for his little eyes that protrude but as twin bubbles from the surface, open and close on it all day.

But his brother is less grim. He has no such square jaw. His snout runs out like a bowsprit set with a double line of teeth. He can dart like a torpedo. Nor has he that Mephistophelian look of patient-expectation-sure-to-be-rewarded. He earns his prey by sober industry and takes his rest on some secluded bank where the sun is hot and dries him to a greenish yellow. Alas! for virtue, that this very modesty of seclusion should make him the target for hungry rifles slaying afar. It is one of the breaks in the monotony of cantonment life to devote a day to the shikar of these monsters. In the grey of the morning

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a long, rude canoe—a dugout with boarded-up sides and a thick pile of brushwood laid on the floor—lies swaying on the current that shoots under the steep bank. The sahibs climb in and lie down on the brushwood. The three coolies dip their paddles and push off into the stream. One of them perches himself on the stern gunwale, and with his paddle keeps the nose downstream as the current seizes the canoe and whirls her downward; one bales out the evil-smelling bilge water; one blows on a little lump of charcoal smouldering in an earthen basin, lights his hookah, and blows a long cloud with grunts of satisfaction. The canoe swings on under the high banks from which the ragged tamarisk peers over at her.

The morning sun, but just lifted above the banks, flashes and flashes again on the broad-moving flood. From a brake of sugar-canes a native is urging a pair of huge black water-buffaloes down a broken place in the bank. On the tail of a mud-bank a hundred yards ahead an adjutant is standing on one leg watching our approach uneasily. He lifts

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one long stilt and strokes his bill, then with a flap lifts himself in the air and wings off over the paddy-field to see us depart, his whole being an indignant repudiation of flight. Under the walls of the old native city, and by the place of bones. Here clouds of water-birds, terns, arise and dash about in shrieking clouds. Round a great bend, a pattern of swirls and rapids, where the river chafes uneasily at his delay. Either side now, great billowy plains of silver-white sand with ragged fringes of tamarisk. Above them the dust-devils go pirouetting giddily, and the horizon is a silvern glare. Far down, a long ashy grey object is lying on the bank. The field-glasses reveal his true character. A mugger, a twelve-footer at least. The paddles are drawn in and the canoe drifts silently. At a hundred and fifty yards distance the mugger stirs and begins to slide waterward. Two rifles crack. The canoe glides on. But the bank is empty, mere bare sand. "We will land next time," they say, "the canoe rocks too much."

By this spot there is a large Hindu temple

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hedged about with thick trees, neems, mangoes, and tamarinds, which cluster about its pyramidal towers so as almost to conceal them. On the bank before it small flags on long bamboos flutter across the river. The water in front swarms with turtles, whose snaky heads project at every few yards. Here, one evening, I spied a long ridge travelling the waves in the eye of the sunset. Early next morning I was down there afoot, and, sure enough, he was there lying on the shelving bank taking the early sun. Never was such a chance. There was no cover, so I walked boldly towards him. Thirty yards away he began to move, and his long snout had just touched the water when I fired. The soft-nosed bullet from my Winchester took him in the neck, but far back. He stopped dead, while his tail curved round, like a whiplash, to a half circle. It was evident he was paralysed. I was already determining the precise size of dressing-case his skin would make me at the tanners at Cawnpore as I walked up to him. To finish him I gave him another shot behind the shoulder, when,

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instead of collapsing altogether as I expected, he straightened out and began to drag himself into the water with his forearms. I could not stop him, though I had a violent impulse to seize him by the tail. As he was twelve feet long I might as well have tried to stop a torpedo boat. Down he went, down to his underworld, where I make no doubt the turtles and his brethren soon finished him. But I learnt the lesson that the heart of a mugger is not his tender point. Nor would one expect it.

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THE LUCKNOW RESIDENCY TO-DAY.

THE story of the Mutiny has been written and re-written, and the part the Lucknow Residency played in it has had volumes to itself. I do not propose to revive in detail any of the events of the drama; only to show you the vestiges of those who have passed and are passing still from our midst to whom that piece of English history was a living reality. It is hard to think that it all befell a bare fifty years ago. You may wander there now amid the peace that enshrouds these places, where human passions staged themselves and reached at last their end; and now so much is it in the past that it might be Stonehenge or Pompeii or some old monastery full of vague ghosts and old dreams of the dead. Year by year it is visited by tourists who come amd go, taking away photographs or a spray of purple bourgainvillea or a bullet which some budmash *

* Bazaar rogue.

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says he has dug out of the walls; but to the jealous Anglo-Indian it seems they can know nothing of the spirit of the place. It is one grave of soldiers and soldiers' wives and children, men and women who spent their lives in the plains and in the sun, dwelling in tents, in perils often, to whom home and home faces were not to be reached in a fortnight by the next mail-boat.

The banner of England flies there still, as it never ceased to fly, from that old tower which, tumbled down and broken by round shot, still lifts a proud ruined head to the blue Lucknow skies. Down the slope, green and velvety, the deep slow waters of the Gumti flow by the combed-out water reeds, past the Chutter Munzil Palace and the outskirts of the million-peopled city which has forgotten. Across the far bank the countryside opens in park-like plains of groves and fields till the far trees filling gap behind gap close the view. We gaze on it now in tranquillity, but how those eyes ached that watched it daily through drifts of gun smoke and fumes of blazing

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villages. Two great guns stare out across it always, silent now. They were brought from the "Shannon" at Calcutta. Sixty-pounders of scant consideration in these days, but they have played their part for the Empire. Now, like old warriors in Valhalla, they take their lordly ease amid cypress and flowers, while ladies come to stroke their sides with dainty gloved fingers, and the sparrows hop over the trunnions undismayed. Hardby there runs a low brick wall half hidden by trailing things, and in the corner of it is a gate. It surrounds the cemetery, sad place by night, but now, in the full sunshine, alive with gauzy dragon flies and many-patterned butterflies, mellifluous with bird music, somehow gay. Yet the names and the lettering on the stones read sad enough. There are the old, the οἱ καμόντες Perhaps they were not so loth to go. But most of the names are of young officers and their girl-wives, and very many of infant children. It is odd to think that these would now be old men and women. Many shrubs grow with such pleasing informality that one scarce

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see the white stones peeping here and there. Roses open their pink and red cushions to the bees, and the plumbago, so blue and tenuous of petals, sways lightly to the wandering breezes.

In the centre of all lie the ruins of the chapel, but a few feet high since revengeful Moslem hands razed the walls. Buttress and interstice, and nave and chancel, are plain to be traced still; and, though no lights shine from their windows and no organ peals out across that God's acre, the benediction of the building seems to rest still on each mound and to hallow the sleep of the martyrs who wait beneath its walls. It is shaded by high and leafy trees from which the fallen leaves drive in restless eddies, now here, now there, like bands of romping children, and finally come to rest in big brown melancholy heaps in the corners of the walls.

The history of the siege for soliders, for statesmen, for historians, for engineers is in the books; but the domestic tale of it, of grief for the lost and misery for the living, is here in

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these mute mounds and stones. It is the habit to speak of these women as "Victorian," and the word seems to imply a lack of hardihood. But it may be hoped that English women of to-day would be found equal to like calls. We see the place where they lived through months of disease and imminent massacre. The rooms are large and underground like the vaults of a cathedral. They are, however, well ventilated and light. In the hot weather it is a delight to go down the winding staircase and to walk amid the thick subumbral pillars in the coolth. Once only a shell found its way in there. It came in where the ground meets the wall, bringing a heap of masonry with it, struck the opposite wall and there burst. One woman was in the room at the time, and, though she was untouched, she died of the shock. It was down there, too, that the lassie had her dream of the sound of the pipes and vowed that relief was at hand.

In the building above these vaults is the museum of relics and the model of the Resi-

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dency, its trenches and works of defence, as they were in the siege. There are old muskets, pistols, swords and daggers, stone and iron shot, all fingered by fingers long since dust. But their story lives again. Outside, in the blaze of Indian sunshine, on the bright green lawn a tall white column rises. It is Henry Lawrence's memorial. Beyond it is the old banqueting hall which they made into a hospital. Here again, though the flags are broken and the fountain-basins empty and the sky shines through the roof, what agonies and cries resound, what leave-takings repeat themselves, while the walls ring with pattering musket-balls and crashing round shots. Sometimes in a moment it is all borne in on one, and a horror takes the mind; the next, as ever, the stimulus of present things reasserts its sway, and the shrinking soul revives. As elsewhere, it is peace here now, with Peace's emblems of flowers and birds. Subtly and with deft fingers the thread-like root disintegrates stone from stone, but with Nature's gentleness, not the barbarous cataclysmic force of man.

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Last of all, there are the doctor's house, where Sir Henry Lawrence breathed his last after four days of agony; and the famous Baillie Guard Gate—held together with iron rods and clamps (so shattered is it). Scarce a finger's space on it is unmarked by bullet or shot. They battered it with two guns a bare hundred yards away, till with a single gun the little post outfired them and silenced them. I cannot suppose there is a spot in the world so memorised as the Lucknow Residency with all that is best and worst in men, with insensate hate and unselfish patriotism. But time, like the creepers round the Baillie Guard Gate, will cloak it all, concealing what it may not heal, and a semblance of brotherhood take the place of unfraternal rage.

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AN INDIAN WELL.

FROM down at the bottom you might see the stars in the sky just as they are imaged each night in that small circle of black-shining water which, like a mysterious fairy door to some underground cave, full of shakings and wrinklings innumerable, as if clutched by restless fairy hands, closes the end of the long dark shaft. Anon a splash rings out with a muffled hollowness as some big frog leaps and falls back, and the undulating vibrations lap and suck at the smooth round sides. Cool, cool! It is quite another world down there. The mere fact that it is water, cool, clear (though black as ink to the view), and life-giving, divorces it from all else. The ground your feet are planted on is hard, baked, dry, and cracked. It heaves into a minute hillock here and there, displays a lean half-withered blade or two sprung from a miser's sowing, yawns into a nullah with arid chasms and Lilliputian cliffs for sides, and so slopes

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gradually to the river, where it forgets all claim to fertility in a long beach of flashing white sand. The sun is high overhead, scorching as through a hundred superimposed lenses. The sky is burnt-out blue, in places almost grey through the dust-laden atmosphere. Like some Miltonic figure the great kite hangs poised, drops a little, wheels, and poises again. Back of us, some fields ploughed into a semblance of broken-up bricks set with a few spiky yellow-tasselled acacias lead back to the road, one of those Indian roads that grateful mango and neem trees overarch—else how, indeed, should any man, sahib or native, walk thereon? It is the only bit of shade. It runs away, growing smaller, far as the eye can see, across the dry level plain.

What of the track itself, of which glimpses appear through the roadside trees? It looks shady. So it is. It looks dusty. It is that too. If you could see yourself in a glass, you would find your eyebrows and moustache a pale cinereous grey. I have come fourteen miles along that road this morning, leaving

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the cantonment before the sun rose; for early rising here at this time of the year is a luxury, and something more. As to surface, if people get congested livers out here, it is not the fault of this sort of road. It is what is called "kuchha," that is, not "pukka." Two excellent words these, which occur frequently in the Anglo-Indian vocabulary. "Kuchha" means "jerry-built," "shoddy"; "pukka," anything solid and sound. A kuchha road, then, is anything between a switchback and a chain of small disconnected reservoirs overlaid with three or four inches of fine dust. So far as I know, Indian dust is a thing apart. It has the virtue that it spoils nothing. It is of the consistency of flour, often not far from the colour of flour. Out here it has its uses. I believe that, suspended as it is, veil-like, in the air, it serves to mitigate the extreme fierceness of the sun rays, which else might be too destructive. An odd phenomenon you see are the "dust-devils." The air is still. Not a leaf stirs. Suddenly, on the plain near by, a little pillar of dust rises in

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a whorl. It is about the size and height of a man. Round and round it spins, like a serpentine dancer, travelling as it spins, a veritable small cyclone made visible.

This is a Government camping ground. In the old days, when cholera ran more untrammelled than it does now, places were appointed at short distances from cantonments to which afflicted regiments might move out into camp. It is part of my duties periodically to visit these camps, and as I am probably the only white man who does see them, it is often by no means easy to find them. They are seldom occupied in these days, and the younger natives scarcely know of their existence. All they know is that there is a big square plot marked by a stone at each corner which they must not till, as it is the Sirkar's. One may take out a map of the country, but betwixt great rivers changing their channels and villages with names as inconstant as a London pickpocket's maps made a dozen years ago do not greatly aid.

I had a weary travail to discover this one;

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though I started before dawn, it was now about ten. A mile away was a mud village, from which some curious natives came out to stare. About a furlong away I saw a small temple, a little high square building on a mud platform. The walls were grotesquely figured with men and animals, all divinities of sorts, though sadly knocked about. Round about ran a few spiny trees, and hard by was a plot of young seedlings. An old man with a clean-shaven head moved in and out, and a couple of sturdy naked youths drove a lean old buffalo to a trough near the well. Such was this harbourage of sanctity in the wilds, and I took the old man for a priest, the two youths for his "choir boys." I strolled over and threw myself down in the best shade I could find, for now I was out here there could be no return for me till evening. The buffalo and the two young cultivators fell still as statues gazing at me as I ate sandwiches, while the old man began to busy himself about the temple. As I lay, I could see into the dark recess of it, a cave-like place ten feet square. By the

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door stood a stone animal on wheels. It might have been a cow or a hippopotamus, but probably it was a cow, since hippopotami are of no import in India. Sometimes the old man wheeled it forward a little, sometimes he pulled it back. The opening of a bottle of soda renewed the interest of the "choir boys." The pigeons cooed in the thick trees by the roadway; the grasshoppers leapt from blade to blade; on the broad river beyond the sand a fat old country barge with a heavy sail had just run her nose on to a shoal. I called to the "choir boys" to get me some water for my horse, and when the idea had clarified in their minds they obeyed. Over the well ran a long bamboo bent like a lateen yard and pivoted on an upright post. The thick end near the ground had a huge lump of clay plastered on it as a counterpoise. When the bucket had been pulled down into the well and filled, the lump of clay at the remote end of the yard served to pull it up again.

There is much mystery and fascination in a well—it may hold many secrets. In the

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days when the Thugs practised their devilish cult, many an old well became a tomb. Dotted about the country yawn the open mouths of many that have run dry, now a menace to the horseman, and possibly still a receptacle for many things which it is better should not see the light of open day. You would meet strange company down there; no other ingredients could be wanted by the most exigeant of witches for her cauldron. Frogs as big as your foot, toads, rats, centipedes, cobras. What more could Hecate ask? One day my máli (gardener) brought up a karait in the bucket—a small snake, a foot and a half long, whose bite kills in ten minutes. I have him now in a bottle of spirits. But these earthly realities are, of course, nothing to the ghouls and djinns, and it is quite certain that Alice down her rabbit-burrow or Ulysses in Hades could have met no greater marvels than the luckless wight who has tumbled down an Indian well. Yes, quite another world. The water down there, dimpling, black, cool; and up here—I like to think of that lonely well

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up in Northern India and of the old bare-pated man with his stone cow. It is a great thing to have something to occupy one's time.

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THE COMING OF NIGHT.

An Indian Dust-Storm.

The heat had been excessive for a fortnight. On the vast plains of this province of Oudh the dust had been gathering day by day, rolling in little spiral eddies before the breath of the hot winds that swept the country like a living flame. Herbage was parched and dried; the jhils were shrunk to mere muddy bottoms. On this afternoon there seemed a promise of relief. The merciless sun was obscured from time to time by wisps of cloud, while the horizon had everywhere a thundery aspect that brought a refreshing coolness through mere anticipation of rain. Yet there was nothing to tell of the tremendous phenomenon about to come. I strolled in the compound of my bungalow, tempted out by the clouds over the sun, though it was early in the afternoon. Lizards darted through the dried herbage, making it rattle with a

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crispness that told of long drought; the grey tree squirrels leapt from bough to bough or gambolled with tails aloft across the sunbaked beds; the hoopoes strutted in conscious pride of gay plumage and graceful crests; and to and fro, up and down, with tremendous sweeps of their black pinions, the crows and vultures quartered the unpromising territory. They seemed to have no prescience of what was coming, though wild animals are supposed to have a sort of prophetic instinct of such things. Soon afterwards one or two small drops of rain fell.

Two hours later I was sitting on the lawn of the clubhouse. The threatened storm had apparently passed over. The punkah swung to and fro overhead, jerked by the arm of the lean coolie squatting on the grass. There was the rattle of cups and saucers and a languid drone of conversation. Of a sudden an exclamation from some one directed all eyes towards the sky. Far away, beyond the dark green tops of the mango trees, a slaty blue pall had spread itself all along the eastern

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horizon. It was slowly rising, and was shot with darker and lighter streaks constantly changing. The crest of it had a billowy, soft appearance, which contrasted with the azure sheen of the sky elsewhere. This bank rose slowly higher and higher as we watched, for some few minutes presenting little change. Then, it appeared, volleys of sand shot up into it as though drawn by some powerful magnet in the sky, diversifying the slaty blue with huge plumes of a dun yellow. As it drew nearer, which it did now very rapidly, it seemed like some immense wave—of such appalling blackness and density was it—shot through and through with whirling columns of smoke and dust. Everywhere behind it was a bluey-black darkness worse than night.

By this time the doors of the club were closed, the tables had been hastily cleared from the lawn, the band of the native regiment had thrown down their music stands and betaken themselves to shelter, and all was ready to meet the blast. One or two traps that had been caught out came galloping up the drive,

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their horses well nigh unmanageable. For a few moments we stood at the door waiting and watching while the immense cloud, now towering up to the zenith above our heads, menaced us with its descent. The higher portions of it travelled far in advance of the lower, so that while the fringe was overhead, the skirts were still trailing in front of us. A dun darkness of rapidly increasing gloom came over us. The phenomenon now became appalling. Now road, trees, and everything before us were blotted out of sight. At the same time the air was filled with an extraordinary confused roar, made partly by the wind, partly by the thousands of tons of sand and dust sweeping down on us, and partly by the terrified shrieks of dogs, jackals, birds, and other creatures overtaken by the blinding, suffocating mass. Vultures, crows, and many smaller birds flew headlong before it, dashing over the lawn in scores. One or two whorls of dust leapt up from the path before us, then with a roar it enveloped us just as we leapt behind the doors and bolted them. The rush of the storm

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shook them in fury. In two seconds a Cimmerian darkness enshrouded us such as no night ever made. I thought of the line "I heard the trailing garments of the night," a piece of poetic imagery seldom so literally realised. The huge lift of the wave as it swept on us, the soft roar, the immediate extinction of light, all justified the metaphor.

Nothing could exclude that blinding, choking dust. The hall and every room was full of it. The lamps, which had all been lighted in preparedness, burnt with that dimmed lustre familiar to people who have seen a Manchester fog. The wind howled round the eaves, shook at the doors, blew up the carpets. The fine powder began to settle everywhere. Soon a thin layer of it covered chairs, sofas, tables, and floors, and pinches of it crept into keyholes and crevices to remind us of its coming for many weeks to come. One of the most beautiful sights that came before the darkness was afforded by some thin-leaved trees standing between us and the on-coming cloud. Most of the trees are dark and thick-

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leaved even to leatheriness; these had leaves delicate and mobile as those of an English beech, and exquisitely transparent. As the darkness spread behind them they caught the rays of the sun and stood out like fountains of emerald. The darkness lasted ten minutes, then began slowly to abate. It may well be spoken of as itself abating, for it was something more than mere absence of light. It was a darkness filled with horror, in which great gusts of wind and clouds of dust, with dire suggestions of belated wayfarers struck down by unseen flying branches and horses bolting blindly, gave a sense of bewilderment and impotence even to those in shelter from its fury. Before the gloom had quite gone twilight came on and gave place to moonlight.

As I rode home down the long tree-bordered avenues an unnatural peace lay over all. The soft lights of the bungalows gleaming across their tangled compounds, the scent of sweet herbs and dry wood smoke, the silent barefooted figures padding along the road in the shadows, the clearness of the sky and

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splendour of the moon challenged the reality of that great convulsion of but an hour ago. But the dust in my bungalow lay nearly an inch thick and had spared nothing, and across the drive lay many broken twigs and boughs, while from the porch hung dismally a splendid remnant of the creeper that had been the glory of its pillars, and its wax-like petals lay pathetically shrivelled in the verandah.

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IN AN INDIAN GARDEN.

Not long ago I had the desert for my garden. No one disputed it with me, but the beauty of this fact was spoiled because no one wanted to. It rolled about me day after day for a thousand miles each way, and there was no man there to say what I should or should not do with it. The sky all round me was my fencing. It was the grandest garden in all the world, but my finite mind could not luxuriate in its immensity. But now I have a garden of my own which I share, rather than rule, with a host of other living things. I need no escort to walk abroad in it. There are no robbers except crows and other people's gardeners. Sometimes I see a flower there that was not there before. I ask the máli about it. He is a little perplexed and rubs one horny foot up and down his bare shank. It is a foolish question for the sahib to ask. There is the flower, and if in some other garden there is a vacancy, if the sahib chooses to look round he will find

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a vacancy, perhaps two or three, in his own, and thus the balance of nature is preserved.

In the centre is the bungalow with its deep and shady verandahs half hidden by a wealth of climbing things. All day long in the bright white sunshine the small grey squirrels flicker up and down the pillars, or with uplifted tails chase one another out on to the lawn. They do not go far, for high aloft on the chimney above the long thatched roof sits *Chil* the kite, and he does not regard the squirrel as sacred; other people do. For when the great god Ram was so hard-pressed by his foes he knew not which way to turn for help, he called on all the animals to help him, and the squirrel was the first to come. "You, you little creature," asked Ram, "what can you do?" Nevertheless he drew his hand in a gentle caress down the little beast's back, and the squirrel has three long finger marks down his back to this day. Like many sacred people, he is very touchy and squeals with rage at times, creating pandemonium all through the bungalow.

The shade falls cool and sweet in many-

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checkered patterns here on the lawn with its half-baked grass, there on the drive and the flower beds; and in and out the blue jays rustle and flash from gloom into sunlight and back like living rainbows. The air is drowsy all day long with the coo, coo of doves. They begin in the early morning as the sun gets up. In the heat of the day they peck and preen in the shady caverns by the edge of the lawn where the bushes overhang. All things living make a cheerful noise. Flocks of brilliant green parrots dash in and out with shrill screams. The black *minas* (starlings) chatter like a sewing meeting, perpetually fidgety, jumping from tree to tree for no apparent object. A long row of shrysanthemums flaunt their heavy blooms along the verandah front. To and fro sways the head of a tall palm as it catches the topmost breezes. The other trees break at intervals into a soft unrest as if stirred by passing spirits as some errant eddy finds its way amongst them and rouses them from their sunshine dreams.

What a rest and peace is in it all. After

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the multitudinous worries of an Indian official's day this is a little Lotusland where it is always afternoon. He may sit writing in a room in the bungalow, the big folding doors open before him, through which he watches from time to time the endless play of the outer world—the green lawn with its wings of *neem* and *shishum* trees lucent in the crystal sunshine, the shadow-flecked background, and the *personnel* of beasts and birds. The whole air is ringing with vociferations, pipings, whistlings, squawks, caws, shrieks, screams. Everything is so much alive, as if life could not be lived too much. Or he may walk, secure from the sun under his pith topi, where small, unobtrusive birds, like tits and wrens, of brilliant hues, stir amongst the twigs as he brushes past. They never show themselves in the open, and he wonders at the use of their vivid colouring. Clearly Nature does many things to please herself, though we are ever inclined to regard her works in terms of our own æsthetic requirements. Then there is the long drive that gives on to the road—the white, noisy, busy road

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where the little ekkas and their ponies rattle up and down all day long and tall camels go swinging by with their jingling bells, and all the tide of Indian life ebbs and flows—the lean, naked fakir with his mud-daubed body and face, the graceful coolie woman with her bare, bangled arms and burden poised on her head, the babus and traffickers of the bazaar. The drive is a long aisle of over-arching trees, and on either side grows a small jungle of rose bushes. The hollyhocks are growing tall there too, and a crowd of poppies beginning furiously to blush.

But of a sudden there is the sound of a great bell going, and down a path comes a jingle and clank of chains. It is a gang of convicts, with a warder behind, returning to their grim home. They have been working in my garden, for it is my privilege as governor of the prison so to employ them. The warder salutes, and they pass clanking down the drive. It is a cherished privilege and the reward of good behaviour, this working in the garden, and I like to have them there.

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The great bell has ceased tolling and all is quiet once again, the quiet that is compact of natural sounds, undisturbing however loud and dissonant. Only at evening time, when the yellow and gold sky gleams through the trees, does this daylight clamour end, when the chilling earth begins to odorise the air, the soft glow of lamps shines from the bungalow, and in his wonted corner the bearer, with his face to holy Mecca, is prostrating himself on his prayer mat.

Printed at the Pioneer Press by GEO. SIM, No. 679--5-7-'12.

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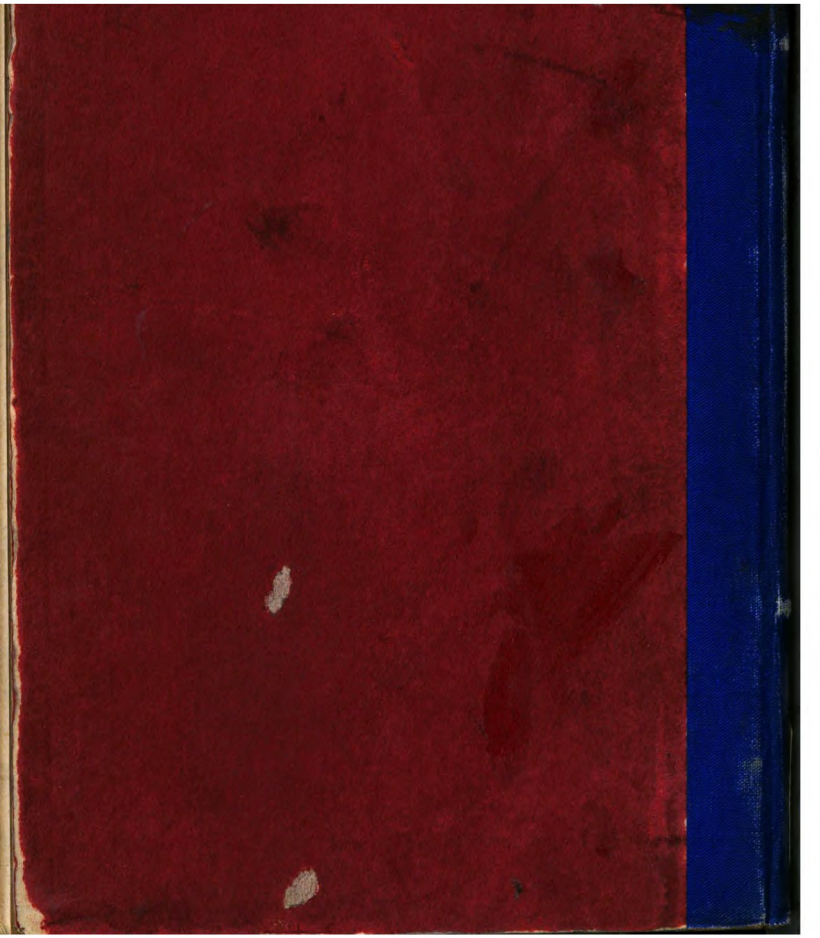

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